

KASHMIR
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K O V I E W

Elusive Dialogue

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has said he would like to have a televised debate with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to resolve differences between the two neighbours. He said this in an interview to a Russian television channel on the eve of his visit to Moscow where he will meet the Russian president Vladimir Putin. This is the first visit by a Pakistani leader to Russia in more than 20 years. Khan said it would be beneficial for the 1.7 billion people in the subcontinent if differences could be resolved through debate.

India, hasn't responded to Khan's offer yet. But one change that has happened in both the countries is that the mutually antagonistic rhetoric has reduced. New Delhi's demand, now used with a little subdued force, is for Pakistan to stop terrorism in Kashmir. There is hardly anything that has been said beyond this. But there has been one redeeming difference: the anti-Pakistan rhetoric has drastically reduced in the country, and that too during ongoing Assembly elections. Ditto on Pakistan's side.

If anything, this alone is an indication that something has been brewing between the two neighbours. Or one could say, was brewing. There hasn't been any statement from either country recently that indicates some form of an engagement is ongoing between them. Instead, Islamabad that has been so far most vocal about outreach to New Delhi has also gone silent.

But after re-affirmation of the 2003 ceasefire agreement in February last year, the two neighbours have failed to build on the goodwill. There have been no further measures, nor does it look likely there will be in the near future. New Delhi seems in no hurry to do this. If anything, this only goes on to show that India feels little pressure to relent. The unmistakable signal to Pakistan is to temper its expectation about the extent to which India can accommodate it on Kashmir. As always, India wants terrorism to be the central issue and wants Pakistan to stop supporting militancy in Kashmir. Pakistan doesn't accept it backs terrorism.

Anyways, if last year's figures for infiltration and the killings of foreign militants in Kashmir are anything to go by, Islamabad has held back from supporting the local militancy. New Delhi is not going to reverse the revocation of J&K autonomy. It remains to be seen whether it restores statehood anytime soon. A sustained, meaningful dialogue between the two countries has the potential to lead to a positive outcome. So, the neighbours should restore it sooner than later.

O T H E R O P I N O N

It's War

It is not every day that the world witnesses the planning of an invasion on television. On Monday, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, ordered his troops to enter parts of eastern Ukraine controlled by Kremlin-backed rebels, effectively launching what most nations will view as an invasion of a sovereign country. That followed a televised meeting of Russia's national security council where Mr Putin asked his top officials to share their views on what he ought to do, after insisting that the West had refused to address his concerns. Russia has laid out what it claims is a legitimate reason for sending its troops into eastern Ukraine. Moscow claims that the government in Kiev has perpetrated "genocide" against the Russian-speaking population of that part of Ukraine even though no evidence has been made public. The rebel-backed 'governments' of Donetsk and Luhansk recently asked Russia to recognize them as independent states. Mr Putin did so on Monday after his officials had previously said Moscow had no intention of recognizing the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. Once it had acknowledged these militia-held territories as sovereign entities, Moscow said it was merely sending "peacekeeping" troops there at the request of the rulers of these regions – not invading them.

Yet, even many of Russia's close friends will find it difficult to accept Mr Putin's move as legitimate. No other country recognizes the rebel governments in eastern Ukraine. China and India, close friends of Russia despite their own differences, have longstanding positions against secessionist movements, driven by their own domestic challenges. What China will welcome – and India will not – is a distracted United States of America, which will now be forced to refocus its attention on Europe, as opposed to the Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, Western sanctions against Moscow will hurt the global economy and India's trade and defence partnership with Russia. Could all of this have been avoided? For the past three months, the US and Russia have engaged in calculated theatre, using information warfare to advance their negotiating positions. The US president, Joe Biden, has repeatedly warned of an imminent invasion of Ukraine, and Washington and London have both deliberately shared intelligence assertions with reporters to suggest that Mr Putin is planning false flag operations to create a pretext to invade. But both sides have treated the escalating crisis with a sense of inevitability – rather than any meaningful concessions to avoid war. The result shows.

Telegraph India

Only Suffering For Women?



TO OPERATE BEHIND THE veneer of religion, lends impunity to these perpetrators who misconstrue religion and derive pleasure of sorts while criticising others behind the facade of ethics and morality

Amir Suhail Wani

Should people be concerned about what others do on a moral plane and is there anything that legitimises people to infringe upon and criticise the choices that others make? A straightforward and a rationally sound answer to this question should have sounded like "No, People should rather mind their own business". But that answer, no matter how sound and healthy it sounds, doesn't sound musical to all ears and there are people who will oppose this position tooth and nail and claim for themselves the position to criticise and condemn others, their choices and preferences. While this tendency to judge others and to question their choices cuts across the spectrum, but it too has been observed that it is mostly the girls and women who are preyed upon in this sport. On the one hand, the instances of domestic violence, sexual harassment at workplaces, in public transport and elsewhere go unabated.

On the other hand, a section of people are looking for reasons, no matter how trifling and instances no matter how insignificant to troll, abuse, stalk and even assault girls – be it in virtual social space or mundane physical world. What girls wear, how they carry themselves around, what choices they make and what aspirations they choose to follow, everything is subjected to public and social scrutiny and this exercise is undertaken by those who don't share even the remotest link/connection to the girl subject to criticism. Social media warriors seem to derive a sort of strange masochistic pleasure by trolling and bullying girls and making unwelcome entries into their lives.

The portrayal of people and society as such is not an attempt at demonization or misrepresentation of society wholesale but it is indeed an attempt to awaken ourselves to the malicious elements dwelling our society, hijacking the lives and liberties of people in general and women in particular.

The incidents of violence against women – both virtually and physically have been a recurring phenomenon. Experts have opined that mostly these incidents of violence and abuse go unnoticed and women keep suffering exploitation, of different magnitudes and natures. The closest of relatives have been now and then reported harassing girls and these incidents have been time and again brushed under the carpet. But two stark and gore examples from previous days have established the gravity of the problem and signalled the scale and spectrum of abuse and trolling faced by women. In the first instance of this despicable attack was the acid attack on a girl, shock waves were sent across the board as news of this incident spread like a wildfire.

The girl is presently fighting for her eye-sight and carrying the scars – physical and mental – that might stay with her for her entire life. Previously too there have been isolated incidents

like these, but their isolated nature doesn't mean that one turns a blind eye to these devastating incidents. These incidents are to be evaluated and plugged based on the intensity of destruction they cause in a singular event and the criminal precedent they set for others to imitate and follow. With this incident surfaced the quantum of vulnerability that girls/women are susceptible and the audacity with which perverted minds can

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run into their lives and destroy it the way they want to. The spectres of acid attack that took place at Hyderpora a few years ago haven't faded from our memories, but the tragedy we face is that these incidents aren't stopping and now and then crop up here and there. What compounds human anguish and hatred to this magnitude that doing away with all marks of civility and humanity, one stoops down to the level of animals and commits horrendous violence against fellow humans? This is a question to be addressed jointly by parents, the education system and the society if we want to steer our youth in a constructive direction.

In a more recent and still more shocking incident, a storm took over social media when the twelfth standard topper appeared in an interview without a head cover or what is termed as Hijab in religious parlance. Those deeming the unveiled appearance of the girl for the interview

trespassed all codes of ethical and moral conduct. Abuses were hurled, religious commitment of girls was called into question and all boundaries of privacy, freedom of will and conscience obliterated. As if the ordeal wasn't enough, the girl had to separately appear in an interview clarifying her position on her dress code, ideology and non-observance of Hijab. This is a radical position bordering insanity, fuelled by the pseudo-scholarly understanding of religion. To operate behind the veneer of religion, lends impunity to these perpetrators who misconstrue religion and derive pleasure of sorts while criticising others behind the facade of ethics and morality.

When one contemplates the prerequisites of human existence as a social creature, one is driven to the concepts of liberty, equality and dignity. In absence of these guarantees, human life becomes, like the lives of other animals, one driven by biological necessities and also constrained by the same. It is only in presence of these essential values of liberty and equality that man attains the limits of his possibilities, potentials and becomes a creature of benefit for himself and the world at large. But it is here that one encounters a disturbing and penetrating question and that is the issue of guaranteeing these rights both to men and women. What is often seen is that in any discourse of liberty and emancipation, it is men who have occupied the centre stage and around whom the discourse has revolved. Narratives, paradigms and worldviews were formulated and promulgated taking man as the referent and standard. Women have been historically left on the margins and peripheries and their social construction has always been undertaken under the presumption of treating them as others.

What has been more tragic is that women were subjected to subalternity and deprived of their agency. They were even deprived of their right to speak for themselves and inevitably it were men who defined them, their agency and their identity. Marginalised and pushed to peripheries as women were, so their agency and presence couldn't but show marginal presence in history and the discourse emerging there from. It is true that myriad forms of violence and abuse stemming against women derive their legitimacy from the social-construction of women and the manner in which society perceives their agency. In an attempt to eliminate the malice of violence and abuse against women, it is essential to conceptualize their existence as social agents. It is also important to call upon legislation the promulgation of women specific ordinances to further their rights and to provide them a shield against the abuse and violence they are subjected to.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer

The author is a writer and columnist based in Srinagar



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PDD Employees On The Frontlines

WITH the onset of winters and heavy snow-fall several essential services are interrupted annually here in Kashmir. During these harsh colder months we also observe a department facing enormous flak from the people for not being able to ensure their services to the subscribers, which to an extent is completely understandable and justified. Yes, I am talking about the Jammu and Kashmir Power Development Department, a department which always remains on the receiving end of the blows from the people for providing erratic power supplies to Jammu and Kashmir, when a major proportion of it is being produced here and more production avenues are being explored and worked on. Al-

though this is an acceptable fact that the higher officials of this department face genuine criticism but, there is a section of employees who are paid meagre amount of wages after months while they leave no stone unturned to discharge their duties. Pictures of daily wage workers of the PDD department surface on the internet often, showing them on the top of electric iron poles in snow and rain trying to restore the power in areas affected by snow. Another side of these pictures is their financial sustenance, serious injuries and even deaths of such workers while fulfilling their duties due to electric shocks. Unpaid wages and the lack of regularisation of their jobs, and the Minimum Wage Act not being implemented, is hurting casual labourers in Jammu and Kashmir, especially

those in the PDD. They not only suffer due to the apathy they receive from the government alone, their families also have to go through an enormous amount of pain and trauma at a time when such a hard-working daily wage worker is rendered physically disabled for life or if such a worker dies on the field. A person employed as a casual labourer is entitled to receive a meagre amount of Rs 225 as their daily wage, many workers have a disdain towards the government claiming that their meagre wages are paid to them after months in installments. Meanwhile, the government's promise of implementing the Minimum Wage Act in the UT of J&K has not seen the light of day. PDD workers have been demanding the implementation of SRO 381 (part of Recruitment Rules) which

promises the regularisation of daily wagers who have completed seven years in the department.

Around one lakh casual labourers – daily wagers, need based workers and others – have been engaged in different departments including PDD

The Minimum Wage Act if implemented in Jammu and Kashmir will ensure an amount of Rs 520 on a daily basis to the workers. These unsung heroes deserve appreciation and acknowledgement of their efforts from us, while the government should also acknowledge their high risk job and implement The Minimum Wage Act which can raise their wages and ensure some sort of financial stability of their household.

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IN PHOTOS

Heavy Snowfall Throws Life Out Of Gear In Kashmir

Abid Bhat

Life was thrown out of gear in Kashmir on Wednesday as most areas of the valley received snowfall - the season's first heavy fall in the plains - disrupting flight and railway operations and leading to the closure of the vital Srinagar-Jammu national highway, officials said.

Most areas of the valley received moderate to heavy snowfall which started in the night and was going on when last reports came in, they said.

The areas in the higher reaches of the Union Territory received very heavy snowfall -- around two feet or more, they said.

The officials said Srinagar - the summer capital of the union territory - recorded about eight inches of snow till this morning.

The authorities have pressed men and machinery into service to clear the snow off the roads, many of which, such as those leading to hospitals and other vital installations, are being cleared on priority, the officials said.



Dangling Cables & Lose Live Wires Of Smart City Srinagar

Abid Bhat

Srinagar declared as SMART CITY still has dangling cables and electric wires strung up from every electricity pole, lamp post and even buildings posing a danger to human life and giving city an ugly look. With the fresh overnight snowfall on Wednesday

hundreds of decaying electric poles even crashed and wires fell on snow covered ground posing danger to passers by and motorists. It's time electricity wires are laid underground. It's also important for places like Kashmir not only for aesthetic reasons but because during winters, ice build-up on the power lines makes them too heavy to be carried

