

The Valley, the Hills and the Summit

Over the past fortnight and more, the purveyors of views, official and unofficial, have been dishing out commentaries that look at the valley and the hills from the unreal vantage point of the 'summit'. Unless we learn to see the summit the way it looks from the valley and the hills, we will never understand all that needs to change before any just and honourable resolution of the dispute is even thinkable.

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They talked too much before the talks, and made the talks impossible; and now they are talking so much after the talks that another round of talks is no more possible. Since they are not children in the practice of politics, it must be presumed that they do not want and never wanted the talks to succeed.

This is about India, Pakistan and the Agra summit. An effort that was hostage to third grade politicians and moronic minds fixated on the virtues of physical might. One might have dismissed the event as one of the many meaningless games that nation states play in the name of diplomacy, if one did not know the pain of disappointment that must have stabbed the hearts of Kashmiris the evening Musharraf left Agra in a huff. Wise people may say the disappointment is of their own making since they should not have had such hopes in the first place. But it is not so easy to be wise if you are living through a nightmare whose most fearsome quality is that you know you will find it true on waking up one morning, and you do not even know which morning. Leaders, whether elected or self-appointed, who cannot see beyond the murky edges of the narrow gutters their concerns are mired in, are incapable of imagining that pain and the proclivity for hope that come from it, nor the disappointment the leaders cause with the cheap tricks and exhibitionism that they have reduced India-Pakistan relations to.

Not only politicians, but the know-all commentators of Indian TV channels with their consciously dishonest wisdom that

would have seemed only glib in another context, would benefit from a visit to Kashmir, not to meet Farooq Abdullah or Abdul Gani Bhat, but the people of the valley in whose name the grotesque show is going on. How long will all concerned let death stalk their land for no identifiable fault of theirs, unless merely wanting something unpalatable to a powerful nation state is itself a crime? And two nation states double the crime? This is the question that is consciously left unasked in all the unending analysis the Indian TV channels that their panelists – 'experts' all, but eminently capable of sliding around truth – have been presenting for more than a fortnight now. The show is remarkable proof of how dishonest the stridently liberal Indian intelligentsia can be.

India is now angry that Musharraf got his chat with media editors telecast. It is difficult to see any reason for this grouse, since both sides have been airing their views on all possible channels of communication, concerning all the matters that could have conceivably constituted the theme of the talks, ever since Vajpayee declared that Musharraf was welcome to come to India any time he pleased and talk of anything he pleased. So what was new that Musharraf did at breakfast on the morning of the talks? It is difficult to get over the suspicion that what has hurt India is that Musharraf came out before the whole world as a sensible and reasonable man, making a presentation to which India has few answers. India refuses to accept that there is a 'dispute' about Kashmir, and that Kashmiris are central to the dispute. It refuses place for Kashmiris in the talks about the future of their own land.

It refuses to acknowledge what has now become a classic instance of the indeterminacy of language and meaning, namely, that one nation's terrorists are another nation's liberators. It refuses to acknowledge that if you are inviting the other side for talks you are implicitly admitting that you have not said your final word. In the face of such obduracy, why would not a plain speaking Musharraf come out as a sensible and reasonable person? He would have had to be an extraordinarily muddled man to have come out as any thing else. And what then is the point of getting angry with him for making you look as stupid as you are?

And yet it is not fair or right that Pakistan should have come out so totally as the virtuous party. Pakistan has the advantage over India that it stresses what is obvious: that the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India is a disputed fact, and that the dispute should be set at rest to the satisfaction of the Kashmiris. It is because Indians – not only the state but the intelligentsia and the political class as a whole – will not accept these plain propositions that one hears so much of evasion and circumlocution in any discussion of Kashmir in this country. But this self-inflicted disability of India has allowed Pakistan to get away with the tendentious gloss it puts on these basic truths. It is never forced to make it clear whether the dispute emanates from the unascertained will of the Kashmiris or the unfinished agenda of partition. Whether it indeed believes there is any difference between the two. Whether the dispute is religious, as the Kashmiri Jamaat-e-Islami leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani said some time ago, or political, as spokespersons of the Kashmir struggle including Geelani's colleagues of the Jamaat felt constrained to clarify in refutation of his pronouncement. Whether the 'will of the Kashmiris' is to be ascertained only in the valley or also in the Azad Kashmir and the northern territories. Whether, if the valley also joins Azad Kashmir and becomes a part of Pakistan, the evidently very strong ethnic aspirations of Kashmiris will be respected by giving them genuine autonomy to arrange their affairs and safeguard their way of life. And whether, most importantly, the 'will of the Kashmiris' is constrained to choose between only the two options of joining India or Pakistan, or is free to

choose the third option of independence, which Kashmiris in sizeable numbers seem to aspire for. India, of course, does not accept that even the second option is available today. It claims that the option was exercised by Maharaja Hari Singh on October 26, 1947, and that is that. It has always used language appropriate to a partition deed for that act and the instrument of accession: the property is made over to me by the deed, and all that remains is for the trespasser to get out. In comparison with this, the Pakistani view is much more reasonable, but only in comparison.

India will be forced to confront its unreasonable attitude, and Pakistan its logic of convenience, when Kashmiris sit as equals in the talks between the two. Since India will not countenance any Kashmiri sitting in the talks, not even the pliant Farooq Abdullah, nominally head of the elected government of the state, Pakistan is again able to get away with an unexplained choice: it contends that the All Party Hurriyat Conference (the Hurriyat, in short) is the true representative of Kashmir. Since India exhibits a paranoid unwillingness to even countenance this suggestion, Pakistan is in the happy position that it does not have to explain its choice.

But the choice is questionable for more than one reason. It is not that the Hurriyat is irrelevant or that it can be dismissed in the off-hand manner affected of Farooq Abdullah, who certainly knows better, and by sundry 'spokespersons' of the government of India and India's political parties, who do not care to know better. The Hurriyat any day has more relevance in the context of the Kashmir dispute than any of the other political outfits that may stake such a claim, not the least of which – in terms of irrelevance – is the party which rules that state. But is talking with the Hurriyat the same thing as talking to the Kashmiris, as Pakistan claims?

Abdul Gani Bhat, the current chairperson of the Hurriyat Conference, a very intelligent and voluble man whose political commentary is invariably built around sweeping historical metaphors and analogies, gave a rhetorical answer when this question was posed to him by a team of visiting human rights activists in the last week of May this year: who voted Nelson Mandela to represent Black South Africa, and who voted Gandhi to represent India? None, of course, and at any rate both Ambedkar and the Muslim League asked the same question about Gandhi, but there was a general acceptance, right or wrong,

that the two men led organisations that broadly represented the relevant public opinion. Can that be said about the Hurriyat vis-a-vis Jammu and Kashmir? The Hurriyat tries to restrict the scope of this question by paring down the populace that is relevant: those who do not dispute the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India need not be counted for the purpose of representation, since India represents them any way. By this logic, those who would rather that Jammu and Kashmir had acceded to Pakistan on August 15 or at least October 26, 1947 need not be counted too, for Pakistan fully agrees with them and adequately represents them. That would leave only those who want 'azaadi' from both countries to be represented in the talks.

It is quite an attractive idea, but it would not help the Hurriyat's case since that organisation overwhelmingly represents that section of Kashmiri public opinion that has the wherewithal to arm itself, which is another way of saying the pro-Pakistan section. It describes itself as an umbrella organisation that carries within it all opponents of the state's accession to India, but the weight of its composition bears heavily on the side of the pro-Pakistan and not the azaadi partisans. The latter are mostly not organised at all, and where they are, they do not have what matters most in the given situation: guns. All the guns are with the partisans of merger with Pakistan.

That section is not slight, but it is not the whole of the valley nor even a majority, by all indicators. It is true that the pro-Pakistan armed militants and the Hurriyat Conference carry a respect that reaches well beyond the extent of popular agreement with their political views, because they are seen as fighting the common enemy, India. The Hurriyat is also respected, and quite rightly, as practically the only Kashmiri voice (barring that of Mehbooba Mufti, the MLA from Pampore) raised systematically against human rights violations by the state and central armed forces. However, all this does not add up to saying that the Hurriyat Conference is an adequate representative of Kashmir.

Moreover, when the future of the whole state is in question, it cannot be assumed that one section or the other of the population is represented adequately by India or by Pakistan. The people should speak for themselves through proper representatives carrying their mandate. And this applies to the whole state, on both sides of the LoC, and not just to the valley. One hears quite seditious ideas not only in the

valley, but also all over Doda, Rajouri and Poonch areas of Jammu; and it is said by those who know that Azad Kashmir is not far behind. It is necessary to say this because not only the Hurriyat, but also the more liberal elements of the valley do not appear to fully realise that the issue is not confined to them but extends to the whole of the state.

But if the voice of the people of the state is to be adequately heard, it is not enough if India accepts the necessity of involving their representatives in the talks, and Pakistan accepts that the Hurriyat Conference does not fully fit the bill. It is necessary that conditions are created at the ground level wherein a free and fearless discussion is possible, leading to the emergence of a mandate, and the identification of representatives to carry the mandate. It is just impossible in the kind of fearsome atmosphere that prevails in the state at present.

Significance of Ceasefire

This, in fact, is the political significance of the ceasefire offered by India during Ramzan last year. It will be recalled that India's offer was coupled with the proposal of direct talks with the militant groups. What is perhaps not adequately realised is that ceasefire and the process of political resolution are linked from both ends. One link, as said above, is that no political solution is possible without peace at the ground level, for without that there can be no meaningful participation of the people, identification of their representatives or the crafting of a mandate for them. But the link operates the other way round too. A ceasefire without political talks would mean that the militants down their guns and India consolidates its political/administrative hold on the disputed territory, thereby achieving by ceasing fire what it has been unable to by waging war. Unless one sees this, the refusal of the Lashkar-e-Taiaba to reciprocate the offer of ceasefire makes no sense at all. Of course, for most of us that rejection need makes no rational sense since the Lashkar is by definition an irrational monster. There need be little hesitation in accepting that it has many qualities definitive of monsters, but self-righteous responses help little in understanding complex situations. And when it comes to things Islamic, too many Indians allow self-righteousness to overtake their sense.

That is why not all Kashmiris, including many who share little of the 'jehadi' mindset, blame the militants all the way

for not reciprocating India's offer. It is of course true that some at least among the jihadis may not want to participate even in a bona fide peace process either because they believe that attrition is the better part of dialogue (which maybe a rational view in a given situation) or because their agenda is not amenable to discussion. But what is at issue is not their extreme responses but the very reasonable apprehension of the Kashmiris that ceasefire without political resolution simply means giving up what they have sacrificed tens of thousands of lives for in the last decade.

This is where one must situate the impression given by India's hopelessly uncertain strategy for political resolution. In November last year the idea was that India would talk straight to the militant groups headquartered in Pakistan. It is now certain that this seemingly sudden decision was preceded by lengthy discussions between the Hurriyat Conference and the PMO. Discussions of the kind that take place when people really want to discuss: minus the glare of TV cameras, uninterrupted by cross purpose pronouncements to the press, and free of mutual mud-slinging. There is a consensus in Kashmir that Atal Behari Vajpayee was sincere about the effective implementation of this strategy but Lal Krishna Advani and the IB saw to it that it was sabotaged. In fact, Advani and the IB are the 'hidden hand' that has prevented the entire political process, whose first step was the Ramzan initiative and the last the Agra summit, from coming to fruition, if one is to believe Kashmiris. Are they right, or has the 'mukhota' conned them too as he has conned many of the intelligentsia over here? One does not know, but one could not help noticing that while all the Indian interlocutors of Musharraf at Agra looked tense, Advani alone exuded the jovial good humour of one who knows the script beforehand.

In any case, the first strategy went awry when the home ministry of the government of India started claiming for itself the privilege of deciding who among the Hurriyat Conference would be allowed to go to Pakistan to initiate the process of dialogue with the militant groups. This insistence was absolutely unjustified, whichever way one sees it, and there was no way that the Hurriyat Conference, or any self-respecting organisation, could accept it. It was counter-productive as well, but of course the whole point is that it was meant to be counter-productive. What one does find interesting is the opinion of quite a few in Kashmir that Syed Ali Shah

Geelani, whose inclusion India opposed tooth and nail, wantonly gave India enough cause with his public pronouncements, for he is as little interested in resolving the issue through means other than the gun as the Sangh parivar. That religious extremists at both ends have time and again found common cause in Kashmir is a seemingly peculiar feature of the Kashmir saga during the last decade. But it is only seemingly peculiar.

And then, while extending the ceasefire the second time in mid-April, India altered the strategy without any rhyme or reason. All talk of opening dialogue with the militant organisations was given up without even saying so, and it was replaced by the quaint idea of dispatching K C Pant to talk to whoever was willing to talk in India's part of Jammu and Kashmir. It was never clear what India meant to achieve thereby, but while it merely seemed meaningless on this side of the Banihal Pass, on the other side it was understandably taken as playing the fool at the expense of the people of the valley.

But as it turned out, K C Pant was the fool. Even as he set up office, sent notices to all and sundry to open up and talk to him, and expressed relief that at least one respected Kashmiri separatist leader, Shabbir Ahmed Shah, was willing to talk to him, a message flew over his head to Kashmir that the strategy had again changed. Ceasefire with the militants would be withdrawn, but India would talk straight to the one whom it had all along regarded as the biggest militant of them all, Pervez Musharraf. Where did this leave poor K C Pant? Why was he running around Jammu and Kashmir, talking peace to those who had nothing to do with the war, when those who had sent him there were getting ready to talk to the principal warmonger himself? It is to the credit of that veteran Congressman's extinct sensibilities that he carried on gamely, without for a moment letting the mask of self-importance slip. If press reports are accurate, he held his biggest audience neither in Jammu nor in Kashmir but in Leh.

But what are Kashmiris to think of these strategic twists and turns, and why should they blame the militant organisations for not trusting India's intentions in offering ceasefire? As most Kashmiris insist, they want peace, they even want it desperately, as our newspaper columnists and TV commentators say with self-satisfied glee, but they want peace with honour. They do not want to repose faith in a rudderless strategy of political engagement and

dishonour their dead by walking into a ceasefire that will disarm them without committing India to a purposeful process of a just and honourable resolution of the dispute.

And yet there is palpable disappointment that India has called off the ceasefire instead of more purposefully making it part of a process of political resolution of the dispute. In fact, the disappointment started much earlier. All over Kashmir one hears the comment that except at the border, and except during the Ramzan days in the rest of the valley, "the ceasefire was a sham". It was there only in Delhi, or only in the papers, are comments frequently heard. One reason was that even as the army and other central forces withdrew initially from active operations against militancy, the state police and its Special Operations Group (SOG) stepped in. The director general of police of the state in fact declared openly that the ceasefire declared by the union government applied only to the union's forces and not to the state's forces. That was perhaps the first time in decades that Jammu and Kashmir found itself asserting its autonomous status under the Indian Constitution!

And the SOG is not a bunch of mice. Right now, it is the most feared and hated force in the militancy-affected parts of the state. "The SOG has done in one year what the army could not do in 10 years" is a typical comment. Recruited initially from the non-Kashmiri ethnic groups of the state, buttressed by and by with the 'renegades' recruited into the police, and licensed to torture, rob and kill, the SOG epitomises lawlessness. In the more remote parts of

the state, such as the hills of Doda tehsil, on the very day ceasefire was announced, the army men of the local camps were sent to their cantonment and the SOG was brought in. The SOG stayed in the camps till May 31, the last day of the ceasefire. They tortured people, looted their belongings and destroyed their homes as savagely as the army would have done if it had continued operations.

Another reason appears to have been that the army too did not respond to the ceasefire with uniform enthusiasm. "The ceasefire was as effective in each area as the local army commander wanted it to be" is the comment of an experienced journalist. The fact that the main militant organisations rejected the offer of ceasefire and proceeded with their attacks – in particular the *Fidayeen* attacks – was sufficient reason for the army's lack of much enthusiasm for the ceasefire, just as India's perceived non-seriousness in structuring a parallel political resolution of the dispute was sufficient reason for the militants' lack of enthusiasm for reciprocating the offer of ceasefire. And it must also be said that the 'renegades' – the surrendered militants turned armed agents of the state – hated the ceasefire. The cessation of army operations left them helpless in the face of the attacks by the militants and in fact a lot of them were killed in the period and in the areas where the army reduced operations.

The army therefore did not uniformly cease fire except during the initial Ramzan phase, though it does appear to have modified its operations somewhat. "Whereas earlier they used to have crackdowns at night too, after ceasefire they confined their crackdowns to the day time", was one comment heard about the ceasefire period. Another is that whereas in the past, during crackdowns, all the people would be asked to assemble outside in the open while the house by house search went on, during the ceasefire period the forces merely entered the houses and searched, without asking people to assemble outside. A more cynical comment heard is that "in the past they never explained why they opened fire on militants but after the ceasefire they invariably explained that they fired because they were attacked".

But the initial respite of the Ramzan month appears to have brought back to the Kashmiris the memories of early 1990s when there used to be massive public protests against atrocities by the armed forces. The protests never vanished, and Srinagar in particular has never been quiet,

but they became markedly subdued in the later years. With the ceasefire, they erupted again and appear to be continuing today notwithstanding the gradual and unannounced abandonment of ceasefire after the Ramzan month, and the recent official withdrawal. It is in fact these public demonstrations that emphasise the need of freedom – freedom from fear, freedom to associate and freedom to agitate – for the people so that their views may crystallise in a mandate for their representatives.

Custodial Killings

That freedom is sadly lacking. Custodial killings continue, and while there are not enough statistics to verify the Hurriyat's allegation that they have increased, there is no indication that they have decreased. In any case, there could be no reason for the decrease when there is no fear of punishment. And while the army has occasionally punished one officer or two for incidents such as firing upon demonstrations or raping of women, it has never punished any one for custodial killing. The reason is that punishment is a matter of public relations and not rule of law or respect for people's rights. And while killing of demonstrators or raping of women during crackdowns may require some action from the point of public image, killing a young man in custody needs no response since he can be passed off as a militant. That the law makes no distinction between militant and civilian in the matter of custodial killing would be relevant if the rule of law is in question, but not if it is a matter of symbolic bolstering of public image.

It should not be understood from this that the army has been taking action against all incidents of firing on civilian demonstrations or rape of women. Public relation carries no such requirement. It requires only that action be taken in cases where there is some kind of a public outcry or some other impelling circumstance. In, say, the interior of Kupwara district or upon the hills of Doda district no such public outcry can articulate itself and no impelling circumstance will be allowed to manifest itself. No action therefore need be taken. One may safely say that nothing short of blocking the National Highway No 1 A long enough to risk further lives in firing would be regarded as enough of a public outcry to merit some kind of an enquiry and action by the army.

The hills of Doda reveal a most pathetic picture in this regard. Being very difficult of access, inhospitable of terrain and alarm-

ingly infested by militancy (to use the epidemiological imagery preferred by the army) the area has been out of sight and therefore out of mind for even human rights activists until this May. The tales of humiliation recounted by the women of the area at the hands of the army that has camped there from the year 1994 would put the most thick-skinned to shame. The story of Raja Begum and her daughter Gulshan Bano of Baldarri in Doda tehsil is merely illustrative of what goes on there. Way back in 1998 there was an explosion near their house in the village. Army men came to the house ostensibly to search for her husband and sons. They found Raja Begum and her 16-year old daughter, took them into separate rooms and gang raped them. Then they were taken from there to the army camp at Goha, blindfolded and repeatedly raped for five days. They were let off only after a big demonstration was staged on Doda town. The police registered an FIR but the army refused to hand over to them Gulshan Bano's blood-stained salwar. The two women are under continuous pressure to retract their complaint.

Raja Begum says her sons are working in Himachal Pradesh as labourers and that when they came home once after the incident, they were taken to the joint interrogation centre at Doda and detained for 25 days and released only when Amnesty International issued an appeal, after which the young men have gone again to Himachal Pradesh and are scared to come back home. The army and the police say the two young men are in fact militants. Let us grant that it is so to make the argument simpler: does that justify what the army did to their sister and mother? The senior superintendent of police, Doda, has an all-inclusive answer for such questions: the people of the area are in the grip of the militants, and will say whatever the militants tell them to say. An even simpler answer that the army some times gives is that all Kashmiris are liars, and that is that.

But even in the more visible parts of the valley, the situation in the matter of sexual abuse appears to have deteriorated over the years. We have all heard of the 'comfort women' and their equivalents that emerged to service the sexual needs of the American and Japanese armies of occupation. Well, some thing very similar to that is happening in Kashmir, in addition to direct sexual assault during crackdown and search operations. "In the Kupwara villages, soldiers of the army camps force themselves into houses at night and come out in the morning"; "brothels have come up

in villages of Kashmir which was unheard of in the past"; are expressions of this abuse. Some if not all of these women are widows who have lost their husbands in the militancy and counter-militancy. That this is a gross human rights abuse cannot be hidden by the fact the unlike in the crime of rape, the woman here may appear willing.

We have spoken of impelling circumstances and the difference they make to the army's response to allegations of human rights violations. A good instance is the Magam outrage, which is probably still fresh in the memory of media personnel. But what is remembered is only that on March 10 this year when press and visual media personnel went to Magam, a biggish village on the Srinagar-Gulmarg road, to cover a popular demonstration against the Border Security Force (BSF), the BSF thrashed them, broke their equipment worth many lakhs of rupees and threw one ETC cameraman from Andhra Pradesh into a nallah. The people of Magam are suitably concerned about the ill-treatment suffered by the media personnel but they cannot forgive the world for not caring about what happened to them the previous day. After all, that is what they were about to demonstrate against, and that is why the press came to their village from Srinagar.

On the previous evening, at about 6.30 pm a *Fidayeen* by name Shoukat Ahmed Khanday of Tangmarg pushed a 'kulfi' cart up to the BSF camp in Magam, and blew himself up along with one BSF officer and some villagers who were there. The BSF men of the camp immediately opened fire in the direction of the explosion. There is some doubt as to how many of the seven villagers who died on the spot died in the explosion and how many in the firing by the BSF. The residents of Magam are certain that quite a few of the civilians died in the firing and not in the explosion. However, what is certain is that afterwards the BSF went into the village firing indiscriminately and killed two more persons. One was Ghulam Mohammad Dar, an auto-rickshaw driver of Srinagar who had the ill luck of driving his vehicle into the village just then. The other was Ghulam Mohammad Bhat, a newspaper vendor who was going towards the BSF camp to deliver the day's papers as he did every evening. It was in protest against these killings that the residents of Magam were getting ready to demonstrate on the next day, and that was why the media personnel were there, smelling trouble perhaps but not realising that they themselves would be at the receiving end of it.

The relevance of this incident for our discussion is that the army has ordered action against the officers responsible for the assault of the media personnel – they were not only media personnel but many of them including the worst beaten were non-Kashmiris too – but it has nothing to say about the senseless killings of the previous evening. The imperatives of the situation are so minutely severable.

To understand the extent of the insecurity the people suffer from, it is necessary to realise that the armed forces are spread out widely in the rural areas, and the people are never outside their reach. Speaking of his inability to give courage to the people to testify against the army in the investigation of an offence committed by its personnel, the senior superintendent of police, Pulwama confesses that 'we are here in the towns and they are in the villages. We are 100 they are 3,000'. The specific reference was to the killing of Ghulam Mohammad Pandit (65) of Mohanpura, Shopian tehsil, Pulwama district. He was called to the 1 Rashtriya Rifles camp at Ahgam along with the numberdar of the village in the afternoon of February 21 this year, and as the numberdar was not in the village, he took that man's son with him to the camp. The allegation was that Pandit and the numberdar were sheltering militants. At the camp Pandit was thrashed mercilessly for two hours and collapsed. He died the next day at a hospital in Srinagar. It is a clear case of custodial torture resulting in death, but the head of the police of the district confesses that the complainant himself – the numberdar's son – has developed cold feet, and given the massive presence of the army in the rural areas, there is nothing the civilian administration can do to infuse courage in them.

Kashmir is a valley of isolated habitations of farmers, cattle-herds and shepherds watched over by strategically interspersed camps and the mobile patrols of a heavily armed alien force. The omnipresent armed forces have little empathy with the people and are trained to look upon all of them as actual or potential traitors and Pakistan agents. That is what makes them alien, not merely that most of them are from linguistic and ethnic groups other than Kashmiri. An air of intense suffocation hangs over the valley, rendering any uninhibited political interaction among the people an impossibility. If there is no way the army is going to leave the valley in the immediate future, at least the army should be strictly disciplined as

an essential requirement for a free and fearless participation of the people in any political process aimed at resolving the Kashmir dispute.

The helplessness of the common people in the face of the omnipresent armed forces is best illustrated by the ease with which the forces are able to force people to act as shield for them against the militants. A very horrible incident of that kind happened at Zazna(A) near Ganderbal on the Srinagar-Leh road on this year. There is an isolated lift station of the irrigation department there, meant for a few workers operating the gates of a canal. Nearby is a camp of the 5 Rashtriya Rifles. On May 17 this year, about 25 men of the 5 RR camp went to the lift station, broke open the locked outer door and called out the workers there. The army had found an abandoned bag at a distance from the lift station which they suspected to be carrying an explosive device, and they wanted the workers – a pump operator, a gate operator and a gardener – to open the bag to verify the suspicion. The three workers were dragged to the spot where the bag lay, thrashed and threatened that if they did not open the bag they would be shot dead. After pleading vainly for mercy, Mohammad Sultan Ittoo, the pump operator, opened the bag reluctantly and died instantly in the explosion. His colleague Habibullah Dar the gate operator suffered serious injuries and died later that evening in a hospital at Srinagar. The gardener Ali Mohammad Ganai suffered a compound fracture in his right upper arm and is still bedridden.

What kind of a political resolution of the dispute is possible when the people who are central to the dispute are undergoing such hell? Over the past fortnight and more, the purveyors of views, official and unofficial, have been dishing out commentaries that look at the valley and the hills from the unreal vantage point of the 'summit. Unless we learn to see the summit the way it looks from the valley and the hills, we will never understand all that needs to change before any just and honourable resolution of the dispute is even thinkable. Until that is done the leaders and their entourage will be doing to tour of the exotic places and cities of the two countries – from summit to summit – not because they want to but because the world's only policeman will not let them be, but nothing of substance is likely to result, or if it does it will not be an honourable resolution of the dispute as the Kashmiris see it. **EW**