

## Let's talk to let in light of sanity

**EDITORIAL** (January 05, 2013) : It's in the nature of things that neither peace nor wars last for ever. No surprise then the war in Afghanistan is drawing to a close - the verdict who won and who lost will be given by history. If Pakistan's war on terror is also headed in that direction on the face of it there is not much in evidence. In fact opposite to that appears to be in the making with a sharp uptake in the incidence of terrorism over the last few weeks. The high-profile murder of the ANP's topnotch leader Bashir Bilour, the Pakistani brand of Taliban stormed a Levies post and took away some two dozen Levies and shot them dead. Some other brand of terrorists ambushed a bus carrying Shia pilgrims in Balochistan killing almost the same number of innocent travellers. Meanwhile, in yet another gruesome attack on a Punjab-bound bus the unidentified terrorists took lives of about half a dozen passengers. But, quite momentarily, as their killing-spree continued, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan raised 'flag of peace' by offering to sit with government for talks - of course predicating parleys upon a host of preconditions which no one in right mind can accept. Then followed it up by releasing a video explaining as to what those preconditions are. Obviously, the TTP offer has been largely ignored by the Pakistani authorities; as strongest rejection came from the ANP government that had lost one of its top leaders in the suicide attack owned by the TTP. Then there was that small chink allowing light to shine up the peace option; someone in the TTP said no one should expect the Taliban to lay down arms - a stance ANP chief Asfandyar Wali has no beef with. Addressing a condolence reference in honour of Bashir Bilour the other day, he said his party 'did not want Taliban militants to lay down arms, but only to renounce violence and take the path of dialogue'. Howsoever small that commonality shared by the TTP and ANP chief may be one would like to see in it - even at the cost of being branded overtly optimistic - right potential for kick-starting peace talks with the TTP. After years of hardest fight given to the TTP insurgency in the tribal region the fact remains that the Taliban have not been defeated; they are not even weakened enough to foster hope of them surrendering. They have been striking at targets of their choice, including most sensitive security installations. Taliban's ability or prowess to 'persevere' could be gauged from the fact that full-throttled military operations, extensive use of air and ground power and drones that are regularly employed have so far only reinforced the measure of their determination not to run away. This is a truth, though very bitter, but an inescapable reality. Without realising it as it obtains today "meaningful talks" with the Taliban insurgents - the ANP chief wants the federal government to set in motion - won't be possible. Initiating peace talks with the TTP is for Islamabad to do; his party government in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa can only fight back and it has done it at an enormous cost of life and limb. Even if neither the Taliban nor the ANP government betray any sign of giving in to a discerning mind the time has come for result-oriented peace parleys with the TTP. Of course, there is nothing very concrete in terms of TTP willing to sit for talks, but history tells us short of total defeat or victory the contending parties would like to come to the negotiating table brandishing toughest possible positions. But as the parties sit around the same table and talk, they wittingly or otherwise, open a window of opportunity to let in the light of sanity. And the time works to cool down the tempers as war fatigue catches up. On the face of it what the TTP sets as preconditions is simply unacceptable. But then there are many commonalities - like same

religion, same country, same history and same people - which can be capitalised to gain weight and tilt the balance in favour of peace. It has to be accepted that the worst sufferers of the Taliban-planned terrorism are the people of Fata, the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and the Pakhtun society. If they are asking for peace talks there is no logic that others in the country should reject it. And if the US-led coalition is in talks with the Afghan insurgents in spite of so much of blood-letting on both sides why there should not be a change of mind in Pakistan.

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