

Pak-Afghan relations

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The hosting of Afghan President Hamid Karzai as special guest at the Pakistan Day parade and the signing of agreements for regular bus services between the two countries' border cities and for cooperation in political, information, broadcasting, cultural and tourism fields during his visit bodes well for their bilateral relations. Their peoples are bound together with strong religious, cultural and fraternal ties, which need to be further bolstered by spurring their cooperative relationships comprehensively. This is all the more essential, given the fact that their economies command many a complementarity that could be profitably exploited for their peoples' progress and prosperity. Moreover, both are presently confronted with the common menace of terrorism, which they can overcome more effectively with joint efforts. It is encouraging that their leaderships are fully alive to this indispensable need of forging more intimate and closer bilateral relations to their peoples' mutual benefit. That President Karzai came all the way to attend the military parade at Islamabad and also oversaw the conclusion of these agreements is an eloquent earnest of that realisation at the highest quarters of the two fraternal neighbours.

Indeed, the people of Pakistan harbour deep sentiments of goodwill and wellbeing for their Afghan brethren, which they have manifested forcefully many a time over these years. When the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan, many a poacher now crowding in there for fructifying their geopolitical goals abandoned it like a hot potato. In fact, some of them now in this prowling lot's forefront had implicitly, if not explicitly, acquiesced in the Soviet aggression. It was the people of Pakistan who stood by their Afghan brethren resolutely in that hour of their distress. They opened their arms to the Afghans seeking refuge from the Soviet invaders. And they allowed them the freedom of movement and economic activity not permitted to them elsewhere. Even as the Afghan freedom fight inundated their own land with illegal arms and drugs, they didn't forsake their Afghan brethren. And despite severe Soviet threats and warnings, they didn't relent, either, in their support of their cause. Though this country is often berated on account of the Taliban, they were arguably a homegrown phenomenon, the product of a fratricidal war that ensued between rival mujahideen commanders after the Soviet retreat. In spite of that tirade, there has been no diminishing in the affection of this country's people for their Afghan brethren. And even now millions of Afghan refugees are living here.

This by no means is an argument for any Afghan requital for all that this country's people have done over the years for mitigating their Afghan brethren's distress. Rather, it is an argument to highlight how close they are to each other and how closer they can become by cooperating with each other. By every account, they are the natural allies in their happiness and grief. And they are the natural partners in their progress and advancement. Then, Pakistan offers the easiest routes to

Afghanistan for its overseas commerce. And Afghanistan offers the easiest route to Pakistan for access to the Central Asian markets. Any bad patch in the past on their relationship must be left behind for its fruitful present and promising future. In that lies their best interest.