**[Treading on the same rake](https://nation.com.pk/25-Nov-2020/treading-on-the-same-rake%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)**

November 25, 2020

Inter-country relationships are built on vision and foresightedness. They require hard work of many years to shape up. As they are based on mutual interest and benefits—that is why both parties must be very sensitive about mutual respect. One irresponsible move can put all the hard work in danger. The classical definition of diplomacy indicates that it is an art and craft at the same time, which requires skills such as; “the ability to assert your ideas or opinions, knowing what to say and how to say it without damaging the relationship by causing offence.”

Over a period, Pakistan-France diplomacy has worked on three core fronts; politics, economics, and culture and education—political dialogue and consultation on security issues is under smooth transition. Bilateral trade between the two countries stood at 1.4 billion euros, up to +4.6 percent each year. Around 32 French companies are represented in Pakistan mainly in energy, transport, public work, and civil engineering, environment, and pharmaceuticals. Over 185 French companies are members of the Pakistan-France Business Alliance.

Pakistan and France have bilateral cooperation and the work of the Agence Française de Développement (AFD, French Development Agency). Bilateral aid in cooperation and cultural action has two main targets: supporting the Pakistani government’s academic policy and consolidating France’s influence in the fields of culture, language, social sciences, governance, and archaeology.

French academic cooperation focuses on students at Master’s, doctoral or postdoctoral level, in the framework of Pakistani government grants or for students in international mobility. The Pakistan-France Alumni Network is a key asset, fostering the influence and visibility of the French Embassy’s activities.

French scientific and technological cooperation is also aimed at supporting joint projects led by French and Pakistani research laboratories (“Péridot” Hubert Curien Partnerships, launched in September 2014), as well as fostering ties between innovation and entrepreneurship.

French language, culture, and ideas are promoted through a network of three Alliance Française branches (Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad). Security cooperation focuses on training to tackle document fraud, illegal immigration, terrorism, and drug trafficking. Defence cooperation between France and Pakistan focuses on elite military training, exchange and transfer of expertise in areas linked to counterinsurgency, and French-language teaching in the military sphere.

Unfortunately, a recent series of tweets of Federal Minister of Human Rights Shireen Mazari apparently has dented the Pakistan-France relationship when she reportedly used derogatory words against French President Emanuel Macron, while citing an article about the statement of the French Prime Minister which was contrary to the facts. Although the Federal Minister deleted her tweets after being reprimanded, by that time the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs had already called the Pakistani Chargé d’affaire in Paris and registered a strong protest regarding the Twitter message of the federal minister.

Meanwhile, in Islamabad, the Embassy of France also released a strongly-worded statement against the Minister’s tweets. After such diplomatic unpleasantries, the withdrawal of Twitter messages did not help anymore.

The statement of the spokesperson of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs France is more than enough to remind our politicians that they need to grow up.

Just imagine the Minister of Human Rights tweeting, which has been perceived by the target country France as “these despicable words are blatant lies, loaded with the ideology of hatred and violence. Such slanderous comments are disgraceful at such a level of responsibility”. All the adjectives used in this statement are catchphrases already being used for us and we as a nation always find Pakistan in the middle of fight and flight mode, and at the end chose flight because these adjectives may not become synonymous to our existence. Imagine all those Pakistanis living in France and on a fine sunny morning, they find themselves accountable for somebodies’ erratic statement. Do we have someone who can teach the ruling party basic rules of diplomatic decency?

It may be recalled that Pakistan faced a similar kind of embarrassment when Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi passed comments about Saudi Arabia, reference to its role in OIC over Kashmir cause. After a strong reaction from Saudi Arabia, the Foreign Minister tried to explain that he didn’t mean what he said. However, the damage had already been done.

Our economy depends on the EU and the Middle East. History has given up on our politicians, their irresponsible attitude creates ripples of hatred for the general public especially for the people living abroad, already under suspicion.

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