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**Yet another surprise**

Last year, on the first anniversary celebrated by Pakistani nation to acknowledge the professional response by the PAF on February 27, 2019, I had mentioned that: “Today, US President Donald Trump is visiting India at that time when one year of this (Pulwama) incidence has passed but the tension between the two countries could not be ended.”

However, after the passage of two years, it is a pleasant surprise for all peace-loving people that the military leaderships of Pakistan and India have agreed to implement the ceasefire arrangement of 2003 at the Line of Control (LoC) in order to ensure peace and stability in the region.

According to ISPR, the surprise announcement was made in a joint statement by the militaries of the two countries on a ‘hotline contact’ between their directors general military operations (DGMOs). India has also endorsed the statement, terming the conversation with the Pakistani DGMO as ‘free’ and ‘frank’ and held in a ‘cordial atmosphere’.

The international community, including the US, has welcomed the move for ensuring greater peace and stability in the South Asia region. The UN chief has also hoped that this ‘positive step’ will provide an opportunity for ‘further dialogue’.

No doubt, the recent development is a remarkable move by both sides. However, the joint announcement also resulted in refreshing my memories of the visit to India two years ago. At that time, Pakistan-bashing was on the rise as part of the Indian election campaigns. The situation at the LOC had also intensified to seek voters' support. Due to the Pulwama attack, Indian media was busy airing non-stop coverage blaming Pakistan for the unfortunate incident.

In such critical circumstances, I got an opportunity to visit India to attend the Kumbh Mela. During my meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj (late), Minister of Foreign Affairs and ex-Army Chief V K Singha and others, I made clear to everyone that peace is in the best interest of the people of Pakistan and India.

Taking advantage of my presence there, I emphasized that Pakistan is a peace-loving country, and being the frontline state against the 'war on terror', huge sacrifices have been offered in order to achieve peace and prosperity. Instead of indulging in blame game, the leadership of both countries must strengthen people-to-people contacts.

During my interaction with the Indian media, I urged that no Pakistani institution was behind the Pulwama attack. I further highlighted that there are a few unwanted elements at both sides, which have been active since day one. Such hatred-spreading elements want to spoil the peace process for their vested interests. I emphasized that India should cooperate with Pakistan for countering terrorism and other social evils. Due to my sincere efforts, the local civil society supported my stance that the peace-loving people of both countries should join hands to strengthen people-to-people contacts. Mentioning the peaceful teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, I tried my best to convince that the solution to each and every conflict is dialogue.

Sadly, the Indian leadership, instead of listening to my advice and acting wisely, preferred to violate Pakistani airspace. However, our successful and quick reaction resulted in surprising India and the international community. Later on, the peace gesture demonstrated by Pakistani government was widely appreciated, both at national and international levels. Even today, when India is creating hurdles for minorities and Pakistani immigrants, Pakistan is opening religious places of worships belonging to non-Muslim communities to promote interfaith harmony and religious tourism.

Today, two years later, the ceasefire announcement reinforces my long-held stance that every problem in the world can be resolved through dialogue. India should learn from history that national progress and prosperity is directly linked with regional peace. In today's modern world, the enemies of the past are coming closer in order to strengthen ties. In my view, Pakistan and India should also boost bilateral cooperation to uplift socio-economic conditions of their people. To counter the hate politics by extremist elements in India, all peace-loving followers of Mahatma Gandhi must come forward to play their due role.

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