**[Witness to a revolution](https://www.dawn.com/news/1816716/witness-to-a-revolution)**

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THE recent diplomatic developments between Iran and Pakistan highlight the enduring importance of close neighbourly ties between the two nations that have been a cornerstone of Pakistan’s foreign policy since its independence. As Iran commemorates the 45th anniversary of the Islamic revolution, it is fitting to reflect on a pivotal moment in the history of our bilateral relations — the establishment of strong ties following the revolution in 1979.

Having previously served in Iran as the military attaché during the Shah’s reign, I witnessed the Pahlavi regime’s zenith mar­ked by a spectacular coronation. Nine years later, in October 1978, I returned to Tehran and served as Pakistan’s charge d’affaires during a tumultuous period when the Iranian revolution was at its peak.

By November 1978, it became evident that the grip of the Pahlavi regime was weakening. Daily strikes by workers in key sectors crippled the day-to-day working of the government. The widening gap between the rich and poor, coupled with repression of dissent, corruption, and economic downturn, fuelled the people’s hatred of the Shah.

The Shah, who prided himself on his rapid modernisation efforts, struggled to comprehend the people’s mounting discontent. In November 1978, on the occasion of Eidul Azha, as per custom he met the heads of missions of Muslim countries. He looked visibly shaken and perplexed, as he candidly inquired of the assembled ambassadors where he had faltered. In his view, he had dedicated substantial resources to the betterment of his people, surpassing the efforts of neighbouring countries. Yet, he could not fathom the growing dissatisfaction. As the new year approached, the situation deteriorated and the protests intensified.

It is fitting to reflect on a pivotal moment in Pak-Iran relations.

As the revolution reached its crescendo, with protests, the Shah was forced to leave on Jan 16, 1979, leaving behind a regency council and a new prime minister. The arrival of Imam Khomeini on Feb 1 from his exile in Paris, further intensified the situation. Imam Khomeini announced a new government four days after his arrival. Much depended upon the military and generals who were loyal to the Shah as to how the situation would unveil from thereon.

Recognising the importance of timely action, my responsibility as the head of the Pakistan mission was to lay the foundations of a strong future relationship with the new government. By Feb 11, with the army personnel deserting their posts and the government teetering, I decided to formally recognise the new regime and accordingly sent a delegation of three embassy officials to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the letter of our recognition. There the old guard was still in command, and they arrogantly dismissed the letter.

In the meantime, I was informed by the ambassadors of some Western countries that a counter-offensive was on and the Imperial Guard was being regrouped to take control of the situation. However, when I saw how a military installation right next to our embassy had been overrun by the people who were showering flowers on the soldiers who were de-mobbing, I knew that the time for decisive action had come. I immediately went to the Refah school where Imam Khomeini was staying and handed our letter of recognition to his staff.

We were received cordially and later asked to stay on for a simple meal of rice, curd, and dates. By evening the news was on the radio and TV and special supplements of the Iran press. The headline ‘Pakistan nustakhaeen kishwar’, translating to ‘Pakistan is the first country’- to recognize the Islamic Republic — boldly adorned Persian ne­­wspapers. This historic event mar­ked the overthrow of a dynastic governm­ent through the sheer power of the people, taking the world by surprise.

This was soon followed by the recognition of the new regime by other Muslim countries. This act of recognition, the first by any country, marked a turning point, culminating in the end of the Pahlavi regime and the beginning of a new era for the country. In hindsight, it is now apparent that the revolution was destined to succeed. However, during that period, the situation was far from clear, render-ing the decision-making process particularly challenging.

This narrative underscores the crucial role diplomats play in making important decisions that can shape the trajectory of relations between nations. I had the opportunity to meet Imam Khomeini on several occasions and despite the upheaval in the post-revolution period always found him to be calm and sanguine.

In conclusion, Pakistan’s pivotal role as the first country to recognise the Islamic Republic of Iran reflects the significance of timely and decisive diplomatic action during moments of historical significance.

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