

Pitfalls in dialogue

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By Dr Noor ul Haq

THE recent statements and measures taken by the leaders of both Pakistan and India are indicative of a desire to usher in an era of peace and amity between the two countries. Since the experience of the last over half a century has seen several ups and down, Pakistanis are keeping their fingers crossed on the question of the future of peace prospects.

Whether the process initiated on January 6, 2004 at Islamabad jointly by both India and Pakistan under the leadership of Mr Vajpayee and Gen Musharraf will continue to progress? Whether sustained dialogue, as visualized by Vajpayee on the issue of Kashmir will be held? Whether the new government would be in a position to take bold decisions side-tracking their stated position? Will they be sincere in the solution of Kashmir or will they allow it to linger on, as has been the case in the past?

Apparently it looks that the dialogue will continue since a suitable climate has been created. The mindset of the establishment as well as the civil society and general public is for peace. Sonia Gandhi the president of the Congress was for negotiations when she was in opposition and continues to be consistent when she has won the elections.

But the difference is of personalities heading the government in India. Vajpayee, a very senior leader with unquestioned popularity and stature as an Indian nationalist, was in a position to take a bold decision and could traverse uncharted path. Recently he is on record having said that his lifetime mission is to have good relations with neighbours. Such remarks by the leader of the opposition will provide substantial strength to those in power if they chose to pursue the path of peace and reconciliation.

Has Manmohan Singh a similar lifetime mission? Can he be bold enough to deviate from the beaten tracks? Can he, being from a minority community in India, be able to assert his views on the majority community as forcefully as Vajpayee perhaps was able to do?

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who have sacrificed so much since partition, especially during the last fourteen years, as to whether they wish to accede to India or Pakistan.

Can there be a way forward on Kashmir? Yes, if all the parties to the dispute show flexibility, i.e., Pakistan, India and the people of Kashmir. President Musharraf's four-step mechanism may be considered. First step is to keep alive sustained dialogue between the leaders of two countries. Step two is the acceptance of Kashmir as the issue that must be resolved. Step three would be to look at all possible solutions to the Kashmir problem and agree on which ones could be mutually discarded as unworkable. The fourth step would be to go on to further discussion in involving the people of Kashmir from both sides of the Line of Control with a view to arriving at some reasonable solution acceptable to all parties concerned.

The Chinese approach is also being suggested. They are patiently waiting for the resolution of Taiwan at an appropriate

either side including the hitherto intractable problem of Kashmir.

Like its predecessor, the new Indian government has expressed its willingness to continue the talks. India's UPA government has recently issued "six basic principles of governance" which it would adhere clearly state: "dialogue with Pakistan on all issues will be pursued systematically and on a sustained basis." About Kashmir the document states:

"The UPA government is pledged to respecting the letter and spirit of Article 370 of the Constitution that accords a special status to J&K. Dialogue with all groups and with different shades of opinion in J&K will be pursued on a sustained basis, in consultation with the democratically-elected state government...." Congress policy as spelt in party manifesto and document on "security, defence and foreign policy, indicates that the Congress agenda" visualizes "a stable, working, cooperative relationship with Pakistan under the framework of Shimla Agreement

and subsequent agreements and confidence-building measures initiated by later Congress Governments up to 1996."

At the same time J.N. Dixit, a former Indian foreign secretary and an ambassador to Pakistan, who will exercise great influence on Indian policy making, views its ties with Pakistan differently. In his recent book "India and Regional Developments — Through the Prism of Indo-Pak Relations" thinks that a solution to the Kashmir problem "could be sought with some adjustment in the delineation of the Line of Control" and "the bottom line is: no territorial alienation of Jammu and Kashmir, which is a part of India, to any country."

At another place he even advocates limited "pre-emptive strikes" against Pakistan. He also mentions

that at "some point Musharraf's bluff would have to be called." This thinking read in conjunction with the recent statement of Musharraf that the line of control is not acceptable presents an unpredictable scenario.

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time. Their experience is that Taiwan would come to them under one China policy, as has been the case with Hong Kong earlier. They have adopted a similar attitude about their border dispute with India. But it should be realized that it is the dispute over the demarcation of Himalayan border between New Delhi and Beijing. It should not be equated with the Kashmir dispute where the future of millions of human beings is involved.

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The elections in India have demonstrated that the common people there were not disillusioned by the slogan "shining India" but are more concerned about poverty and unemployment. So are the people in Pakistan. Will this mindset make the leaders move in the positive direction of sustainable peace?

Perhaps, yes on almost all bilateral issues. But the stumbling block remains the issue of Jammu and Kashmir. It has been complicated over the past 57 years. It is not easy to resolve. All political parties in India want a solution of Kashmir within the framework of the Constitution of India. During their rule lasting for almost half a century successive Congress governments did not effectively tackle this problem. Can we hope that the changed ground realities will make them change their stance? The Communist Party of India, which is supporting the present government, is for solution of Kashmir but within the four corners of the Indian Constitution.

On the other hand Pakistan, in the light of the UN resolutions, does not recognize the legitimacy of Indian occupation of Kashmir and could not fail to support the wishes of the people of Kashmir,

rather than allowing the people of Kashmir from both sides of the Line of Control with a view to arriving at some reasonable solution acceptable to all parties concerned.

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It must be realized that the option for use of force by both India and Pakistan has not resolved the issue and it should be discarded permanently. It should also be known that Kashmir couldn't be presented to the other side on a platter. Nor the line of control is acceptable to Pakistan or perhaps to the people of Kashmir.

A sane approach and the only course open is the sustained dialogue between the leaders of the two friendly neighbours, giving due weight to the views of the people of Kashmir. It seems that the process will persist, since there is the pressure of the people and intelligentsia in both countries as well as of the international community. The Track-2 diplomacy is also active and seems to enjoy the patronage of the respective governments.

It will be worthwhile, in the meantime, to allow the people of both countries to move across the Line of Control as well as the international border so as to develop further understanding and friendship with a view to effectively exercising positive influence on their respective governments. Accordingly, both governments should, with all sincerity and seriousness, show progress on all bilateral issues raised by

locally-elected state governments...." Congress policy as spelt in party manifesto and document on "security, defence and foreign policy, indicates that the Congress agenda" visualizes "a stable, working, cooperative relationship with Pakistan under the framework of Shimla Agreement and subsequent agreements and confidence-building measures initiated by later Congress Governments up to 1996."

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It should not be lost sight of that the world is fast becoming a 'global village', promoting the emergence of regional blocs for survival in ever increasing competitive world. We have the European Union, Asean, etc. etc. South Asia is a cohesive geographical bloc and requires unity of effort. The practical approach should be forward looking instead of traversing the beaten path, should display a spirit of flexibility instead of stubbornness, and accommodation instead of rigidity, if problems are to be resolved, the Saarc is to be strengthened and a bright future for one-fifth of humanity is to be ensured.