

weekend's South Asia media conference in Islamabad, Adnan Rehmat and Nadeem Iqbal delve into the achievements and failures of the mediapersons' endeavours towards

Succeeding where all others have failed

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peace
Can journalists succeed where politicians, diplomats and military leaders have failed? A question reverberating since last weekend when something rare — a meeting of news minds from across South Asia — took place, organised by *The News*.

An amalgam of experienced pen-wielders and bold new talent, practicing exciting new media technologies got together in Islamabad.

The participants included politicians (representatives of the Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party from India and Jamaat-e-Islami, Pakistan Muslim League and Pakistan People's Party from Pakistan), diplomats (from South Asian as well as European countries) and a military leader (Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf).

A relatively frank exchange of views took place as journalists outlined the status of



A meeting of minds: First of its kind in the subcontinent. Photo: Rahat Dar

flattered and not made as much a difference as it had the potential to.

Dissenting voices

tunity to build his image [in South Asia].

The optimists
 Others, however, thought

ers," he gushed. "The general perception in Pakistan and India is of seeing each other as the enemy. But in Pakistan, not for a single second have I

Prithvi Raj Chauhan was just as forthcoming on the need for dialogue and peace. "Unless people from both sides visit each other's country, they will not be able to truly understand the other side," he said. "Journalists can lead the way by exchanging visits and reporting realities."

They should be able to exchange and read each other's newspapers and magazines, he said, and felt that this was something that wouldn't be too difficult for the governments of both countries to allow and facilitate.

He added that the two sides should not let matters rest at this and called for facilitating formal and informal dialogue between politicians and political parties of both countries.

"This step alone can bring down the unnecessary tension between our countries drastically and there is a need to give a serious thought to this proposal," Chauhan added.

Newspaper prices

though that an event as good as this, especially in view of its significance, was not only worth covering but well worth being extensively reported.

One interesting comment came from the editor of an Indian Urdu newspaper who said she had a confession to make. "The standard of Urdu newspapers in India is abysmal and I want to tell you why," she said. It was, she revealed, because 80 per cent of the content of Indian Urdu newspapers was lifted from Pakistani Urdu dailies!

The lost opportunity?

Another flip side was what Kanak Mani Dixit, the editor of the Nepal-based *Himal* magazine, termed rightly as 'The Lost Opportunity' while referring to Indian and Pakistani journalists.

Talking to *TNS*, he said despite the fact that it was probably for the first time in the history of India and Pakistan that so many of their journalists had gotten together, neither side capitalised on the opportunity to bare their souls and share their experiences in facing and tackling the myriad pressures that they are subjected to.

The Pakistani journalists could have told their colleagues from across the border what kind of pressures they had to face in Karachi when MQM was a force to reckon with or attacks of religious parties on newspaper offices in the Punjab and NWFP or even blatant state aggression against all newspapers like the harassment of the Jang Group by the Nawaz Sharif government.

Similarly, the Indians could have recounted how they sustain pressures from fundamentalist parties such as Balraj's Shiv Sena or even S and BJP. They could