**Making good with the neighbour**

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Various circles in Pakistan have once again suggested normalization of relations between Pakistan and India. Some economists assert that Pakistan’s economy cannot be saved from a total disaster unless we reach out to our archrival, making efforts to sort out issues in an amicable way.

Retired officers and other powerful people are also of the opinion that friendly ties with India are the way forward for Pakistan. But there are still some elements who oppose the idea of normalizing relations with New Delhi.

India and Pakistan have a lot in common; even in their extremism, they are almost similar. Millions of Pakistani and Indians vehemently oppose harmless West-inspired events like Valentine’s Day. They view everything ‘Made in the West’ with great suspicion. This attitude also prompts them to oppose new inventions. But when such inventions start benefiting them, they gladly embrace them.

While they are strongly opposed to positive Western values that promote love besides creating joys in the lives of people – who see nothing around them but despair and hopelessness – they seem eager to adopt the Western path of destruction. For instance, when it came to nuclear weapons – lethal inventions – people in India and Pakistan gladly welcomed their governments’ achievements.

What these people tend to ignore is the positive values of Western culture and pragmatic approaches that were promoted by Western leaders over decades. They do not learn how these countries put aside their differences for their progress.

Just a few centuries ago, almost all Western countries were fighting one another. The world witnessed two terrible wars that killed more than 80 million people, besides bringing death and destruction to the region.

France and England insanely fought for over 100 years. Protestants and Catholics unleashed a reign of terror against one another, forcing millions to migrate. The Thirty Years’ War not only saw the decimation of around 12 million people but also dealt with physical destruction on an epic scale. For instance, historical sources suggest that the Swedish army alone destroyed 2,200 castles, 18,000 villages and 1,500 towns in Germany, wiping one-third of the country’s towns from the map. The Napoleonic Wars of 1792-1815 also plunged the continent into an abyss. Almost three million French combatants participated in the insane military expeditions of Napoleon that claimed over 3.5 million casualties, which in relation to the population was similar to the First World War.

After losing millions of people to the insanity of wars and conflicts, European leaders decided to put their differences aside and come together to unite. France and the UK that used to be sworn enemies for centuries have now emerged as the two big advocates of European unity. Germany that conquered France during the Second World War, installing a puppet government there, is now the biggest champion of European unity, sharing its leadership with France.

Spain and Portugal that were arch enemies during the 15 and 16 centuries are also part of the same union. Belgium, the Netherlands and other European countries that were bent on annihilating each other in the name of sect, creed, nation and territory are now working together for the prosperity of their people. European states that used to fight for tiny pieces of land or waging wars over territorial jurisdictions have opened up their borders for the citizens of the European continent, with members of one state having the luxury of touring the entire region without any hindrance.

It is surprising that India is ready to maintain good ties with the UK, the country which is accused of killing more than 30 million Indians through its colonial policies in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and other parts of British India, besides plundering over $40 trillion from the giant country. But it seems reluctant to normalize ties with Pakistan.

Also, Islamabad is amenable to the idea of building close relations with the US, which is thousands of miles away and with which Pakistanis share no culture bonds, but it wants to maintain a distance with its neighbour which is part of the Indus valley civilization and whose people share a number of traditions and values with Pakistanis.

I think less than one per cent of Pakistanis understand Hollywood movies or listen to English songs. However, a majority of Pakistanis love Bollywood movies and cannot perhaps imagine a life without the melodious voices of Lata, Asha, Rafi, Kishor, Mukesh and a number of other Indian singers.

Millions of Indians have respect for Pakistani artists like Mehdi Hassan, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Noor Jahan. Recently, the biggest audience for Ali Sethi’s song ‘Pasoori’ came not from Pakistan but from India. The two countries can greatly benefit by normalizing ties, getting access to not only Iran and Afghanistan but also Central Asia and beyond.

Such access will provide India an energy corridor that will further boost the Indian economy while Pakistan can earn billions of dollars for providing such access. Pakistani artists also stand to benefit from such normalization while the scientists and medical fraternity of the two rival states can also reap the benefits of cordial relations between the two South Asian neighbours.

The ruling alliance seems to be in favour of such normalization. Only one political party is interested in opposing the idea of maintaining friendly ties with India. It is time we ignored such rhetoric and made concerted efforts to maintain good relations with all our neighbours, which is the need of the hour given the precarious economic situation of Pakistan.

If China and India can be one of the biggest trading partners despite having problems over territorial claims, why can’t Pakistan do the same? We love to follow the Chinese in all matters. Then why are we not adopting Beijing’s pragmatism over this important issue.

Good relations between the two countries will bring peace and prosperity to not only India and Pakistan but also the entire region. The benefits of peace in the region will travel all the way to Kabul, Tehran, Central Asia and Moscow. But such a move should not be taken at the expense of China.

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