**Reflections on Pakistan-India peace**

BY K H U RS H I D M A H M UD K ASU R I A N D S UD H E E N D R A KU LK A R N I 2021-07-30

PEACE is a fragile plant, which needs constant nurturing. This is especially true when two neighbours with a disturbed relationship attempt mutual reconciliation of differences. When their endeavours are weak, lack sincerity or lose momentum due to mutual suspicion, the plant dies. A new seed is sown, and the same cycle of irresolute efforts and predictable failures continues. This, sadly, has been the saga of the peace process between Pakistan and India.

Regardless, peace efforts must continue because of some unchangeable and inescapable truths. As neighbours, they must develop peaceful and cooperative ties for their own security, prosperity and progress. It is in this context that former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said, `You can change friends but not neighbours.` This was recognised by president Musharraf also and this enabled them to start the peace process. Second, despite many wars, big and small the last of which took place in 1998 at Kargil and many near-war situations, neither country has been able to achieve its objectives through war or violence.

It was a recognition of these facts that compelled the two countries to announce a ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) on Feb 25, 2021. The joint statement of the two directors general military operations generated hope on both sides: `In the interest of achieving mutually beneficial and sustainable peace along the borders, the two DGMOs agreed to address each other`s core issues and concerns which have the propensity to disturb peace and lead to violence.` The international community warmly welcomed this agreement because continuing tension between the two nuclear powers also affects regional and international peace.

The ceasefire has held so far but there are widespread concerns that the promise generated by the announcement is fast withering away. Relations between the two countries are deteriorating. This concern has prompted us to present the following ideas aimed at both consolidating the ceasefire gains and achieving other tangible goals.

One, the ceasefire must assume a permanent character. The tragic deaths of soldiers and civil-ians, which serve no purpose for either country, must forever become a thing of the past.

Two, Kashmir is indeed the core issue in our bilateral relations. Without its final settlement to the satisfaction of Kashmiris, Pakistanis and Indians, there can never be enduring peace between the two countries. It is equally clear that both countries have to show flexibility and ensure an end to violence. In this respect, in the joint statement of Jan 6, 2004, in Islamabad, president Musharraf held out the assurance that he would not permit any territory under Pakistan`s control to be used to support terrorism but emphasised that a sustained and productive dialogue addressing all issues would lead to positive results. It was in this spirit that a win-win formula was attempted and later on president Musharraf and prime minister Manmohan Singh were even able to devise a detailed framework for a possible solution of Jammu & Kashmir. Pakistan and India need to show a similar spirit once again.

Three, both Pakistan and India should recognise that terrorism, bigotry, majoritarianism and extremism are among the `core issues and concerns which have the propensity to disturb peace`.

Similarly, the rights of minorities have to be protected at all costs.

Four, the time has come to reimagine the LoC as a `Line of Connectivity and Cooperation`. The history of the post-World War II era conclusively shows that countries prosper when regions prosper, and when they give priority to `geoeconomics over geopolitics` that is, by building links of physical, digital, trade, economic, cultural and people-topeople connectivity. South Asia is the world`s most populous region; yet, it is also the least integrated, and has the largest number of poor people. We can make it a region of prosperity for all by jointly implementing ambitious connectivity projects, which, as is self-evident, are unthinkable without cooperation with China. This also means that India should not be suspicious of CPEC but see it as an opportunity which could lead to connectivity of the whole of South Asia, benefiting India as well.

Five, another big opportunity for India-Pakistancooperation, which is also a responsibility for both, is to work together for peace, national reconciliation and national reconstruction in Afghanistan. It is no secret that the Pakistan-India rivalry in Afghanistan has destabilised the entire region.

Six, a Saarc summit in Islamabad later this year, hosted by Prime Minister Imran Khan and attended, among others, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi can be the best platform for showing our common commitment to regional connectivity and to peace in Afghanistan, giving a fillip to South Asian cooperation, and also to restarting the stalled India-Pakistan dialogue.

We believe that Pakistani army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa spoke for Pakistan, India, Kashmiris and the entire South Asian region when, in his statesman-like speech on March 18, he said: `...[I]t is time to bury the past and move forward. ... It is naive to apply the failed solutions of yesteryears to the challenges of today and tomorrow.` He framed the choice before us in unambiguous terms: `[W]hether to stay etched in the acrimony and toxicity of the past, continue promoting conflict and get into another vicious cycle of war, disease and destruction; or to move ahead, bring the dividends of our technological and scientific advancements to our people and usher in a new era of peace and prosperity.

We wish to conclude with the cautionary words of Allama Iqbal, a Kashmiri who belongs to both India and Pakist an:`Nations are born in the hearts of poets, they prosper or die in the hands of politicians.

The politicians of our two countries now have an opportunity to choose the path of peace and common prosperity. The dire consequences of not choosing this wise path have been forewarned by the farsighted poet. m Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri served as Pakistan`s foreign minister during the period 2002-2007 He is the author ofNeither a Hawk Nor a Dove: An Insider`s Account of Pakistan`s Foreign Policy. Sudheendra Kulkarni served as an aide to india`s former púme minister Atal Bihad Vajpayee. He is founder of the `Forum for a New South Asia Powered by india-Pakistan-China Cooperation