

Following the 18 April speech in Srinagar by Prime Minister Vajpayee extending the hand of friendship there was an outbreak of hope in South Asia that perhaps peace was around the corner. The hand of friendship had generated some movement.

The bus service had been restarted allowing a few ordinary poor Pakistanis and Indians to visit their dear ones, attending a family wedding or recite 'Fateha' at the grave of a friend or a relative. Before that only the rich who could pay around Rs.35000 for a return economy class air ticket via Dubai could visit India.

The bus service had made it possible for the two year-old Noor to go for a heart operation that saved her life and reunited 13-year-old Munir with his family in Pakistan after two months in Indian jail for straying across an unwired border near his house.

But to those who knew better the mentality and the vested interests that control the steer wheel of the destiny of 1.2 billion people of South Asia the euphoria of 'peaceniks' was unrealistic.

"Nothing will change" they said. And they seemed to be right. The very next day when he returned to Delhi Mr Vajpayee again said there would be no talks unless "cross border terrorism stopped". He keeps on saying

# Peace or Power

BY MANSOOR ALAM

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it knowing very well that it has nearly stopped but needs some real progress in talks for further success.

Subsequently when he offered to restore the bus service, the skeptics again thought that it was cosmetic. They asked "why did Vajpayee not offer to restore the train and air links at the same time?" One could only guess.

It could be for domestic reasons, to placate the RSS and hard-line BJP, or to calibrate the thaw in Indo-Pak relations to coincide its culmination with next years general elections in the hope of winning Muslim and moderate Hindu votes, or to avoid giving Pakistani hardliners the opportunity to gloat that the BJP government had to eat humble pie.

These one could understand, but if Mr Vajpayee was motivated by a desire to cause public opinion in Pakistan to put pressure on Islamabad to make a concession or confession, he could not be more wrong. In 55 years neither side has been able to extract a concession from the other by duress.

Nevertheless, New Delhi took another step forward. Mr Vajpayee an-

nounced his decision to send the Indian High Commissioner back to Islamabad. Pakistan welcomed the move and reciprocated. It appeared logical that visa restrictions would be eased so that people did not have to wait for months. If the two sides really want more people-to-people contact, as each claim, then the first thing they should do is to remove all unnecessary visa hurdles. After all, visa restrictions only cause hardship to ordinary people of divided families or to those who just want to visit as tourists. They do nothing to stop espionage or subversive activities. But logic is not what determines our decisions. Not surprisingly the talks to restore air links held in Islamabad faltered on the bedrock of mistrust and suspicion.

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While the restoration of the bus service and full diplomatic relations are hopeful signs of creeping normalization, the development which really created a mood of euphoria and hope was the exchange of large delegations comprising parliamentarians. Since PM Vajpayee's peace overture four such delegations, two from each side, have crossed the border and received enthusiastic welcome, particularly the last one led by Laloo Prasad Yadav.

In Pakistan too some believed that the visit of the JUI leader Maulana Fazlur Rahman with three other senior members of his party to India and a visible softening in the attitude of Jamaat Islami leaders Qazi Hussain Ahmed and Professor Khurshid Ahmed meant that they were beginning to see the futility of a Jihadi solution of the Kashmir dispute. A similar change on the Indian side was reflected in the brief unusual restraint observed by Mr Advani in his anti-Pakistan harangue.

Those who thought that these were manifestations of a change were again mistaken. The peace needed to save South Asia from starvation, disease

and perpetual indignity is yet very far away. The poor, hungry and deprived masses of India and Pakistan have to wait long for their dream of a better life to come true.

All delegates invariably mentioned the painful level of poverty, illiteracy and distress in which the people in both countries were living. They all expressed the fear that the rapidly increasing population and fast depleting resources posed a greater threat to survival and integrity than the bullets and bombs that both were accumulating at a feverish pitch.

The entire audience applauded these statements as if to say "enough is enough, end the hatred, let us live in peace as friendly neighbours and solve the differences and disputes through peaceful negotiations". Most political observers feel that a large majority wants peace and normalization of relations.

But that has no effect on the all-powerful 'Establishments' in both countries, rather it seems to make them unhappy because that would mean the loss of power and perks that spending of about 20 billion dollars annually brings. War, they know, is not an option between the two nuclear powers, but what does that have to do with spending big money on weapons. They do not believe that peace and power can coexist.

# Towards public negotiations

*Dawn*  
1-9-03 By John Connolly

*Pak-E-Relatic  
Jus*

THE world watches India and Pakistan from afar. We applaud steps towards reconciliation and we fear the times of crisis. In the 21st century, war between these two great countries should be unimaginable yet responsible leaders cannot ignore the unresolved issues, especially Kashmir.

Given the well-known history between India and Pakistan, would it be beneficial to augment the negotiating process with a formal plan that will encourage compromise? There follows a proposal that both Indian and Pakistani leaders are asked to weigh. Either side could call on the UN to adopt the following policy: If private negotiations remain stalled between India and Pakistan, the UN will encourage public negotiations. This plan, requiring full approval by the Security Council, would result in the development of a new international communication process by the UN.

The central instrument of this process would be a short series of perhaps twelve to sixteen-page magazine-size "challenge documents" widely distributed within India and Pakistan and also to many world capitals via a handful of national and international newspapers and/or magazines. Simultaneous publication of these documents would take place on an authorized web site.

Terms for such public negotiations might call for each side's initial challenge document to include its interpretation of history, moral arguments, core interests and negotiating positions. If both agree in advance, each side's initial challenge document would be distributed simultaneously. Then, alternating every two weeks, each side would proceed with its own challenge document, responding in the prescribed format. Essentially, the UN would design the form of this new media, while both India and Pakistan would present the substance of their case before the world public within their own challenge document.

Should a foreign idea, especially one coming from America, be considered by the people of India and Pakistan? This proposal is solely that of the author who has no involvement with the US

challenge documents. A key motive to engage in this process would be to favourably influence regional and world opinion. The motive for an adversary to respond in kind would not be some vague notion of goodwill, but rather, to head off erosion of public support. Refusal to take part in this public peace process would also risk worldwide acceptance of an adversary's interpretation of history.

Will the people in the subcontinent and beyond be interested in these documents? This direct and unfiltered source of news will constitute a new media that will stand in sharp contrast to the many reports on conflicts we have experienced for years. This process will generate a wide range of media coverage. People everywhere, recognizing the life and death nature of these dramatic communiques, may find this multifaceted perspective of enormous interest.

Encouraging both sides to make their cases in this defined format may tempt some to manipulate their version of events. Nevertheless, this direct and equal clash of opinions, in sharp contrast to propaganda, has the potential to yield a greater public recognition of truth than is otherwise possible in today's media environment. If this public negotiating process culminates in a single document signed by leaders in both India and Pakistan and then distributed worldwide, confidence would increase that agreed-upon terms would be adhered to. Similarly, confidence would increase that terms of an agreement would not be reinterpreted in sharply divergent ways after the fact. Personal trust between individual leaders would also become less important because commitments would be spelled out for all sides to witness. Indeed, a peace process that is

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Should a foreign idea, especially one coming from America, be considered by the people of India and Pakistan? This proposal is solely that of the author who has no involvement with the US government. Proposing that the UN play a role in the creation of this communication structure runs against the current US policy, which seeks to ignore or marginalize all international institutions that are not directly controlled by the US. Moreover, technological advances has made the resolution of the dispute between India and Pakistan a world issue. With these public talks, the majority of the citizens on each side will see more clearly than ever the stark and difficult compromises necessary for an agreement. This will provide political cover for leaders, who can then show their constituencies the complex and detailed tradeoffs necessary to reach a settlement. In contrast, leaders emerging from secret negotiations are vulnerable to extremists who can portray one or two simple issues as a towering betrayal by the leaders who negotiated that deal.

What of India's insistence on only direct bilateral negotiations with Pakistan and no involvement of a third party? This is a direct bilateral process. Moreover, it is not proposed nor anticipated that the UN would be an arbiter or mediator for these public negotiations. To the contrary, the UN's proposed role would simply be to create a neutral communication structure. As a practical matter, if President Musharraf called on the UN to create this large-scale conflict resolution strategy, would it not be difficult for anyone to object to another form of dialogue and engagement between India and Pakistan?

What if one side initially refuses to participate? The other side could proceed with its chal-

events. Nevertheless, this direct and equal clash of opinions, in sharp contrast to propaganda, has the potential to yield a greater public recognition of truth than is otherwise possible in today's media environment. If this public negotiating process culminates in a single document signed by leaders in both India and Pakistan and then distributed worldwide, confidence would increase that agreed-upon terms would be adhered to. Similarly, confidence would increase that terms of an agreement would not be reinterpreted in sharply divergent ways after the fact. Personal trust between individual leaders would also become less important because commitments would be spelled out for all sides to witness. Indeed, a peace process that is

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less dependent on personal trust between leaders would contrast sharply with all forms of traditional negotiations including the peace conferences.

Knowing that the eyes of the world will be focused directly on the central details of this conflict will weigh heavily on all sides. This precise phenomenon may exert much more pressure for the two sides to compromise when compared with conventional secret talks. Therein lies the central objection to this entire strategy — outside pressure. Yet isn't the alternative stalemate and the continuation of a dangerous confrontation between two nuclear-armed powers?

Envision the world reaction to a new series of narratives unlike any we have ever seen. Every couple of weeks, prior to each new challenge document, leaders from within India and Pakistan and also around the world would be urging that side to take incremental steps towards the position of the other. Once a momentum for peace is created by this deliberate, step-by-step process, it could become unstoppable. Thus, will Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and President Pervez Musharraf call on the UN to encourage public negotiations if private negotiations stall?

*The writer is executive director of the Institute for Public Dialogue, California, US.*