

# Looking at Indian proposals

*Pak. F. rel. India*

By Sardar F. S. Lodi

INDIA'S latest peace proposals consist of 12 points for normalizing relations between the two countries. Pakistan, after some hesitation, agreed to some of the proposals and put across some points of its own.

India's first item is to resume talks to restore civil aviation links, including overflight rights. This is of some significance to India as all her westbound and northbound flights barring a few, have to skirt around Pakistan air space. This is costing her millions of dollars in extra fuel and it takes a longer time. It is also in urgent need of quick air access to Afghanistan and Iran.

In any case it was India that unilaterally without giving any notice stopped overflights. This time Pakistan wants a system in place which will prevent India from abruptly stopping civil aviation flights at its will and pleasure. This is why the previous negotiations at Rawalpindi failed.

India's second item is the resumption of rail links, following the aviation talks. If the object is to help the people of both countries why hold the resumption of rail link hostage to the success to that of air links. India had stopped the trains from running across the international border between Lahore and Amritsar. India should have announced the restoration of the Samjhota Express

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in certain sea areas. Some method could be evolved to stop illegal fishing in Pakistani waters and early repatriation of detained fishermen.

Item nine provides free medical treatment to another 20 Pakistani children. It is a humanitarian gesture, which should be lauded.

Item 10 is about increase of staff at each other's high commission. In fact, India had recalled its high commissioner from Islamabad and later sidelined our high commissioner in New Delhi and started dealing with his No.2, eventually requesting for his return. Increase in the number of staff would be a natural step while relations are being normalized between the two countries.

Item 11 is about a ferry service between Mumbai and Karachi.

Most of the Indian suggestions are not of such importance that they may help reduce tension between the two countries or act as confidence-building measures. To ease tension, India should have agreed to a ceasefire along the Line of Control to avoid civilian deaths. The ceasefire could have been effectively monitored by extra UN observers.

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Above all, if India is serious about improving relations with Pakistan it should have withdrawn a 100,000 or more troops and other para-military forces from the Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir where over 700,000 troops are acting as an army of occupation and are inflicting untold suffering on the hapless civilian population. Pakistan has given a positive response by accepting most of the measures suggested by India — like the proposals pertaining to the resump-

tion of the Samjhota Express sporting ties, visa camps with provision of necessary infrastructure and staff, land border crossing by people in the age-group of 65 and above, and setting up of a hotline between Pakistan's Maritime Agency and Indian Coast Guard to ensure humanitarian and expeditious assistance to arrested fishermen of either country.

About the Indian suggestions for Mumbai-Karachi ferry service and opening a land route between Munabo and Khokhrapar, Pakistan was of the view that these issues should better be left for consideration during the negotiations.

About the Muzaffarabad-Srinagar bus service Pakistan was of the view that the checkpoints should be manned by the United Nations and Kashmiri passengers should carry UN travel papers. An alternative would

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The fourth item is to issue visas in cities outside the two country's national capitals to shorten travel. This will entail opening an Indian office in Karachi and a Pakistani one in Bombay. It will certainly help the people of Sindh who have now to travel to Islamabad to obtain a visa for India. It may however be recalled that the Indian deputy high commission's office was closed in Karachi as it was alleged to have become a controlling hub of anti-state activities.

The fifth item is to permit individuals aged 65 and above to cross into India on foot. Previously only groups could walk across, while individuals had to be on a bus. This could be of help to some elderly individuals wishing to travel to India urgently. Why not those below 65 also?

The sixth item is to run more buses on the New Delhi-Lahore route. This is a good idea as the number of people wishing to visit across the border is on the increase.

The seventh item is to establish links between the coast guards of both countries. Following from this is the next item, which would prevent India and Pakistan from arresting each other's fishermen

between the two countries. Item 11 is about a ferry service between Mumbai and Karachi.

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This is a cheaper way of travelling and would help the people of Sindh. Ferry service was discontinued after the 1965 Indo-Pak war.

Item 12 suggests starting of new bus services, one between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad. The other would be a bus or rail link between Khokrapar in Sindh and Munabo in India's Rajasthan state. The reopening of the Khokrapar-Munabo link would help the people of Sindh. They would avoid travelling to Lahore to enter India.

As for the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service, Pakistan feels this may well be India's effort to convert the line of control into an international border. In any case very few Kashmiris would wish to travel by road to Srinagar as the entire Kashmir valley is infested with Indian troops and other paramilitary forces. They have been vested with extra powers to stop, search, detain or shoot any body they suspect of being a "terrorist". They are trigger-happy and shoot to kill without any compunction or fear.

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be to allow travel on identity papers issued by the governments at Muzaffarabad and Srinagar.

Pakistan offered medical aid and assistance to the Kashmiris (of Indian-held territory) victims of violence and rape and to the widows from the Valley. Pakistan felt that international humanitarian bodies could be associated with the implementation of this proposal. Pakistan also offered scholarships for 100 Kashmiri students for studies in graduate and post-graduate courses in professional institutions. These fresh items will certainly help the people of Indian-occupied Kashmir.

It could of course be argued that some of the suggestions put forward by India and Pakistan have political overtones verging more towards public relations at home and abroad. Some have called them tactical moves for positions of importance in the larger game. Whatever be the aims and objectives of the various suggestions, they should be accepted on their projected face value. Even a minor confidence building-measure may in the long run help in reducing some tension between the two countries.

*The writer is a retired lieutenant-general of the Pakistan army.*