

Some obstacles in normalization

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WITH the Indian prime minister affirming his plan to attend the forthcoming Saarc summit in Islamabad and Pakistan Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali assuring him a warm welcome, one can say that the next summit meeting of the South Asian organization will proceed without any hitch.

The outgoing Saarc secretary-general who was on a visit to Islamabad recently has also expressed his confidence that the summit should lead to a positive outcome.

Even otherwise there are indications that the strains in the relations between India and Pakistan are being gradually removed. Travel links which were abruptly suspended last year are likely to be restored shortly and there are already talks of new crossing points between the two countries being opened. The visa regime is also expected to become less cumbersome. The visits of groups of Pakistani and Indian doctors, lawyers, legislators, and writers to each other's country seems to be a frequent feature. A peace convention with about 250 delegates from India participating in it should be under way by the time these lines appear in print.

However, the obstacles which will need to be overcome in the process of normalization of relations between the estranged neighbours should not be underestimated. If the initial experience of breaking the ice has been formidable, even more formidable barriers will have to be crossed before a smooth, tension-free environment can be established for peaceful co-existence.

For one thing, disputes such as Kashmir will need to be addressed even after the travel links have been restored and the issue of visas to the common people of India and Pakistan made hassle-free. President Gen Pervez Musharraf's statement the other day that there was "a visible movement" towards the resolution of the Kashmir issue is hopeful and so is the ceasefire on the LoC which is holding.

That the LoC is beginning to become calm as a result of the ceasefire was evident from the first flag meeting of the commanders of the Indian and Pakistani army units on the Sialkot working boundary the

other day. According to reports, Col. Rajesh Gupta of the Indian Army and Col Nadeem of the Pakistan Rangers expressed their satisfaction at the state of the ceasefire and felt confident that the improvement in the climate on the LoC should continue. All this is very encouraging as far as it goes. However, even when India and Pakistan have worked out the modalities of peaceful coexistence and established the basis for living as good neighbours, there will be other barriers to cross. These will perhaps be less tangible but no less relevant to the demands of normal relations between the two countries. One may call them psychological and cultural but that does not make them less important.

Long years of extremely limited exchanges of visitors from one country to the other, of being shut out from a first-hand impression of whatever developments are taking place on the other side of the border, and, above all long years of misinformation and distortion of history have on both sides bred misperceptions which will not be easy to dispel. The enormity of this barrier between the people of the two countries becomes apparent when one realizes that at least three generations have grown up on both sides of the divide cut off from normal contact with one another and being constantly bombarded with deliberately misleading information and blatant lies in order to create a certain mindset.

Much of the misconceptions about Pakistan have arisen out of the various theories about the country's antecedents. What some Pakistani ideologues have to say in this respect is misleading not only for the people across the border but even for some sections of people within Pakistan. There is a tendency to trace the origin of Pakistan to the days of Moenjodaro while there is also a widely held belief that Pakistan came into being because the Muslims of the subcontinent wanted to revive the glory of the pristine form of Islam. Some historians on the Indian side have particularly distorted this to suggest that the Muslims of the subcontinent wished to experience hijrat.

The fact is that the demand for Pakistan was raised by the Muslim League after it failed to get the necessary guarantee of safeguards of the Muslims' rights in an independent India either from the British or from the non-Muslim leadership. Even the great Indian scholar, B.R. Ambedkar, who was to be the father of the Indian Constitution after partition, in his book *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (published in 1940) said that the Muslim leadership desired a separate, geo-political existence because of "social stagnation, communal aggression and ethno-religious frustration" of the Muslim masses.

Indian intellectuals sometimes suggest that Jinnah demanded Pakistan out of sheer vanity because of his "personal ambition for national leadership... thwarted by the advent of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the beginning of the 1920s." The fact is that until 1946 Jinnah was prepared to share the glamour of national leadership with Gandhi and Nehru; he accepted the Cabinet Mission plan. With several generations of post-partition Indians brainwashed with the wrong and baseless information about Jinnah, it is not surprising that they should have misleading conceptions also about the origin of Pakistan. There is clear historical evidence to establish that Jinnah did not at all visualize that Pakistan would for ever live in a state of perpetual hostility with India. In fact as late as November 1946 Jinnah went on record to say as Prof S.M. Burke has recalled in his *Pakistan's Foreign Policy* that 'India and Pakistan will proclaim a Monroe Doctrine of their own for the defence of the subcontinent against all outsiders.'

On our side of the divide, large sections of the Pakistanis

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believe that India has not quite accepted the existence of Pakistan. They ignore declarations by responsible Indian leaders to the contrary. Prime Minister Vajpayee who came to Pakistan at the inauguration of the India-Pakistan bus service made it a point to visit the Minar-i-Pakistan as a symbolic gesture of giving due recognition to Pakistan.

It is also regrettable that in the recent years some Indian film producers have decided to make films which openly label Pakistan as an enemy and glorify India's war exploits. Until recently, writers, producers and actors on both sides scrupulously avoided saying anything of the sort.

A film *Kargil* produced by a Bombay film company on a budget estimated at over Rs 35 crore is the current rage in India. It is easy to see that it will only poison the minds of Indian audiences, specially of the younger people. What is even more alarming, about half a dozen more war films, worth over Rs. 200 crore, will be released in India during the next six months. It would not be surprising if somebody in Pakistan would sooner or later be inspired to make a film from the Pakistani point of view condemning India. This trend must be brought to an end before it gets out of hand and does serious damage to any prospects of peace between India and Pakistan.

Post-script: The former Indian foreign secretary, J.N. Dixit, recalling his days as ambassador in Islamabad says that once when he called on a Pakistani friend, the latter's six-year old daughter on discovering that Dixit was a Hindu skipped around the table chanting 'Hindu Kutta', 'Hindu Kutta.' That some Indian child would be chanting something similar about some Pakistani on the other side of the border is very likely. However, such incidents only underscore the depth of ignorance and depravity which result from children being brought up in a perpetual environment of ignorance, hostility and hate. Unfortunately, such an environment has prevailed for decades on both sides of the border.