

Indo-Pakistan relations

Fresh moves for talks between India and Pakistan augur well for peace and stability in the South Asian region, provided these are held with sincerity of purpose and good intentions for resolving all outstanding disputes including core issue of Kashmir between the two neighboring countries.

The stalemate in the two countries not so pleasant and bitter relations were broken towards end of April 2003, when Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, announced that India was ready to hold talks with Pakistan for resolving all disputes including Kashmir.

The relations between the two countries were marked by heightened tension since December 2001, when India had deployed her forces on the borders with Pakistan and all air, rail and road links were suspended thus depriving the people from going to each other country.

After months of persisting tension, normalization of ties between New Delhi and Islamabad started couple of months back when India started withdrawing her forces to peace time position. This was welcomed and reciprocated by Islamabad in the right earnest. But despite these little signs of improvement in the relations between the two countries, air, rail and road links, not so many indeed, however, remained suspended keeping the people away from each other. There was no denying of the fact that the contacts at the peoples' levels could go a long way in promotion of good relations in any two countries besides what-

ever ties these may have at the government level.

This much for the brief background to the prevailing situation when the Indian Prime Minister made the announcement for holding of talks with Pakistan for solution of all problems.

The announcement by the Indian Prime Minister was reciprocated by no less a person from Pakistan by Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, who telephoned his Indian counter part to welcome the offer for talks between the two countries.

This was the first contact at the highest level between the two countries for months together and also Prime Minister Jamali's first inter-action with his Indian counter part after assuming the high office following October 2002 election. The Indian Government readiness for talks with Pakistan though a positive move but was certainly not an initiative taken by New Delhi.

Pakistan has been repeatedly making offers to India for holding of talks for resolving all disputes including core issue of Kashmir amicably through peaceful means. Such offers for talks have been made from time to time at the highest level of President General Pervez Musharraf, who was on record to have offered to India for sitting across the table at any time, anywhere and at any level for resolving the disputes.

By responding to the Indian Prime Minister's rather much be-

lated though indicative of some positive change in the thinking in New Delhi, Prime Minister Jamali not only endorsed the offers of talks made previously by President General Pervez Musharraf but also reiterated the good intentions of Islamabad for resolving all disputes amicably and having good relations with all its neighbours including India. But the statements by the Indian leadership following the willingness showed by Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee for holding of talks belied the good intentions and indicated lack of sincerity of purpose on the part of New Delhi.

The reiteration of the accusation by the Indian Prime Minister and other Indian leaders that Islamabad should first end the so-called infiltration in the Indian occupied Kashmir from across the Line of Control, was contrary to little hope which arose following Mr Vajpayee's announcement to hold talks with Pakistan.

Indian charge of infiltration from across the Line of Control was not something new. But the same has repeatedly been denied by Pakistan emphatically saying that freedom struggle in the occupied Kashmir was indigenous and Islamabad was only providing moral and diplomatic support to the Kashmiris. Not only this repeated denial, Islamabad had also offered to New Delhi to accept deployment of international observers on both sides of the line of control to verify the

correction of the Indian allegations.

Quite ironically, the Indian charge of infiltration from Pakistan side was being levelled despite the presence of more than 0.6 million Indian Army personnel in the occupied Kashmir who were committing gross human rights violations and torturing Kashmiris to death every day for their demanding the right of self-determination in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions to which India had also agreed some five decades back.

But despite this, besides the Indian Prime Minister's readiness to hold talks for resolving all disputes with Pakistan Prime Minister Jamali had taken couple of more steps unilaterally for creating conducive atmosphere for the two countries going to the negotiation negotiation table at the level which was yet to be determined along with the venue and dates. Acting in a more positive manner, Pakistani government announced restoration of suspended air, rail and road links with India and also ordered release of Indian prisoners from the Pakistan jails. There was no response from the Indian side to the restoration of air, rail and road links between the two countries so far.

Pakistan released some 20 Indian prisoners from its different jails and handed them over to the Indian authorities at Wagha Border near Lahore.

The expectation that India

would also release some if not whole of Pakistani prisoners held in Indian jails for varying period however did not materialise. Though the Indian intentions of not reciprocating the good will gesture were known before the Indian prisoners were set free but still Pakistan persisted with its decision to demonstrate good will and good intentions on its part.

As stated at the beginning that holding of talks between India and Pakistan augur well for peace and stability in the south Asian region and could bring about prosperity and progress for their people provided there was sincerity of purpose and good intentions without levelling of frivolous allegations and laying down of preconditions.

Pakistan on its part should continue demonstration of good will and taking measures for creating conducive atmosphere for holding of talks after all that long gap. But in view of the Indian track record viz a viz Pakistan caution was advisable under the prevailing circumstances. Islamabad should wait for New Delhi taking some reciprocal measures in continuation of the Indian Prime Minister's offer for talks and take two step further for normalizations of relations between the two countries only when Indian takes one step.

Pakistan has not only welcomed the Indian willingness for talks but also taken couple of

steps practically to show its sincerity and desire for lasting peace in the region. Let India reciprocate and take some measures indicating positive thinking in New Delhi for improving relations with Pakistan.

After all relations could only be improved and good neighbouring ties established bilaterally only when good intentions and sincerity of purpose were quite visible. Pakistan Prime minister had already announced to restore rail, air and road links with India, released Indian prisoners from its jails and also banned Jehadi organizations. But Indian leadership had not reciprocated to any of these good will gestures on part of Islamabad. Pakistan had demonstrated its good intentions for ushering in an era of peace in the region after outstanding disputes including core issue of Kashmir with India were resolved amicably.

Indian government should also go further beyond the announcement for talks with Pakistan made by the Indian prime minister and reciprocate to goodwill steps already taken by Islamabad within a matter of days. Durable peace and stability in the region in case of talks succeed and all disputes were resolved then not only Pakistan but India would also benefit.

If Indian leadership believed that majority of Kashmiris wanted to live with Indian then the same could be physically proved by allowing the Kashmiris the right of self determination. The ongoing Kashmiris freedom struggle belied the Indian government claims of held Kashmir being its integral part.