

P.F.R. India
6/11/04

Will Pak-India detente endure?

The Frontier Post

Syed Atiqul Hassan

The latest move towards friendship and diplomatic mechanism by the Indian and Pakistani heads of states is being largely appreciated by the world as the congenial relations between these two nuclear rivals are the dream of not only of the people of the subcontinent but the entire South Asia. Bound by myths of history, race, culture and custom these two neighbours are as thirstier of peace as they politically induced revulsions since their births.

As a matter of fact, for obvious reasons the underlying assumption is that a vast majority of the people involved is genuinely interested in peace between the two countries. It is also recognized in the South Asian capitals that the advent of peace in South Asia is indeed heavily dependent upon Indo-Pak relationship. Like in other post-colonial states, India and Pakistan have also inherited the territorial conflict by the British colonialism in the form of flashpoint dispute over Kashmir. In the last half of a century, Pakistan and India fought three

wars. Unfortunately, since the partition of the subcontinent (in 1947), the rulers of both India and Pakistan valued the solution of the Kashmir dispute in their own interest rather than in the benefit of the people of Kashmir. Neither India, which controls the state through its army, nor Pakistan, which backs Kashmiri freedom-fighters, came out with a solution which could be acceptable to the governments of both the countries and more importantly to the people of Kashmir.

India blames Pakistan for cross border terrorism by funding and training the infiltrators and Kashmiri fighters which Pakistan always denies. On the other hand Pakistan blames India for human rights abuses killing thousands of Kashmiris through its army operations which India defends as action against state terrorism.

The game of threat and diplomacy has been going on for the last 3 decades and at the same time both the countries are in the race of stockpiling dangerous weapons, justifying their deeds with territorial safety.

The Kashmir dispute has been in turmoil since, after the war in 1948, both India and Pakistan went in United Nations

ing their will to go beyond their past stands. President Musharraf first time indicated that he was willing to negotiate beyond the UN resolution which Pakistan has been insisting on from the beginning. The Indian leadership has also shown interest to accept the deal on accepting the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir as permanent borders. The free trade zone, common currency and visa relaxations are also being heard as intended agenda during the SAARC conference.

Landed in Pakistani soil, today, after 24 years since when he visited Pakistan in 1979 as foreign minister, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has very optimistic tone on Pakistan. Replying to a question he said, Pakistan and India are neighbours and required no strategy and this is in the interest of both India and Pakistan as well as rest of the world to work together for peace. Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha, attending SAARC, also hinted at an extraordinary breakthrough between Pakistan and India on all controversial issues

and hoped "January 6 would be a different day in the history of the entire region".

Undoubtedly, there can be countless mutual benefits in many fields for both India and Pakistan in maintaining friendly relations. Both the countries can save major part of their budget currently being spent on defence which otherwise could be used on providing basic facilities to their people, for example: in health, education, clean environment and other human development programmes.

The state's wealth which should have been spent on human development and on welfare of the people or in maintaining better environment spent on building nuclear armaments and ballistic missiles in the name of territorial safety. India, who has the second largest population in the world, spends 25 to 30% of its budget on defense; on the other hand Pakistan - which since creation, most of the time has been ruled by the army - spends 74% of its budget on defence. In result, regrettably, the entire region became risky for nuclear blow.

The corruption is another factor of failing progress in India and Pakistan. The illiteracy is the main

resolution on 21st of April 1948 which states: "both India and Pakistan desire that the question of the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India or Pakistan should be decided through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite". Since then no action could be taken except both the countries had two wars and unrelenting tension on the border. The freedom movement in Kashmir became stronger since the Hindu extremist party BJP came into power in India which opted to use Indian army as a force to crush the freedom movements and groups.

The political history of the two countries shows that in the past the issues between the two countries were being vocalized by the ruling heads and political gurus only to gain or maintain the support from the public. It is also on record that whenever a peace initiative is laid down either the tension or fight broke out on the borders or the terrorists' activities prevailed within the country. For example; after the 'bus-diplomacy' - visit of Vajpayee from Amritsar to Lahore in February, 1999, Kargil war broke out in October, 1999. Following the 'Agra Summit' - a visit of General Musharraf to Agra, in July 2001 - there was a suicide attack on Indian parliament on December 13, 2001.

Tensions between the two countries reached at the boiling point again when Kashmiri militants killed more than two dozen Indian soldiers' wives and children in an attack on an army housing complex in Jammu and Kashmir. India deployed 700,000 Indian troops on its border alongside Pakistan with the threats of 'decisive' action against Pakistan by Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. In response, Pakistan deployed about 300,000 troops to its side of the border to counter the Indian mobilization.

Both the countries tested series of highly visible long range nuclear warhead carrier missiles. Then General Musharraf offered hands of friendship by shaking hand with Prime Minister Vajpayee at the 11th SAARC conference in January, 2002. Now after a year of tension and threats of war, the leaderships of both India and Pakistan seem to be much eager in establishing their relations rather than just to de-escalate tension and prevailing trust. Perhaps both the parties have now realised the need of the time or this might be another attempt to either release the increasing foreign pressure or to divert the attention of the people from their

discussion of the people to either release the increasing foreign pressure

growth periods, the subcontinent is gradually lagging behind. Almost 450 million people live below the poverty line of one dollar a day in India. Its budget deficit is high at 6 percent of GDP, but the country still aiming to spend about \$14 billion a year on defense. In Pakistan, the budget deficit is similar to that of India, with almost 48 million poor people. Despite all myths of poverty, backwardness, filth & economic setbacks as a matter of fact India and Pakistan is a geo-economic land with enormous resources than perhaps any other part of the world. Both countries are the home of the most ancient civilizations, beautiful cultures, age old traditions, an important market, a major agriculture cultivation area, a significant industrial center, pool of some of the most talented people and also very attractive tourist locations.

Some of the key areas in which such common and coordinated programs can be implemented are the industry, trade, banking and financial services, technology, arts & crafts, cultural affairs, shipping, fishing, agriculture, education, health-care, air & sea transportation, pollution control, natural disaster recovery, irrigation, livestock development, fashion, TV & film industry, research, crime control, drug control, control of smuggling, prevention of terrorism, infrastructure development, telecommunications, housing, public service, tourism and information highways. In each of these areas the policy makers can sit together and find develop common agendas and strategies to share resources that may lead to India and Pakistan a free market zones.

The intellectuals, writers, poets, scientists, professionals, artists, of both India and Pakistan have always found desperate to share and expose their talent on common forums. This is the time when media of both the countries can also play a vital and positive role in rebuffing hardliners, condemning obstacles and bringing the Indo-Pak ruling heads closer for better understanding.

One hopes that the during current 12th SAARC conference being held in Islamabad the leaders of India and Pakistan will usher in a new era of relations between Pakistan and India. Both India and Pakistan would open heartedly, understand each others genuine grievances and view points; resolve the issues on the basis of 'give and take' and lay down the foundation of an on-going plan for steady and friendly neighbouring relations in the best interest of the people of both countries. The intellectuals, writers, poets, scientists, professionals, artists, of both India and Pakistan have always found desperate to share and expose their talent on common forums. This is the time when media of both the countries can also play a vital and positive role in rebuffing hardliners, condemning obstacles and bringing the Indo-Pak ruling heads closer for better understanding.