

The summit meetings

By Anwar Syed

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I REFERRED, albeit, peripherally to two meetings between Indian and Pakistani heads of government last Sunday. I propose to say more about these and some of the other Indo-Pakistan "summit meetings" today.

Liaquat Ali Khan met Jawaharlal Nehru in Delhi on April 8, 1950. They discussed and signed a document, which came to be known as the "Liaquat-Nehru Pact," that committed their governments to preserve the right of minorities in their two countries to equal protection of the law. Nothing else that might have been newsworthy was said or done at this time.

Nehru came to Pakistan in 1960 to sign the Indus Waters Treaty, stayed four days (September 19-23), visited Karachi, Rawalpindi, and Lahore. Ayub Khan took him to Murree, had long walks with him, gave him roses, but his efforts to discuss Kashmir got nowhere.

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Bangladesh and Kashmir was dropped, and Pakistani concerns about the return of its POWs and territory were substantially accommodated. The new line of control in Kashmir was not to be disturbed by either side by force. It was agreed also that issues, or disputes, between the two countries would be settled through bilateral negotiations and (as Mrs Gandhi understood and intended it to mean) without resort to third parties or international agencies.

We don't know what exactly transpired during Mr Bhutto's private conversation with Mrs Gandhi. But it is not unreasonable to assume that he made a convincing case along the following lines: (1) given India's military preponderance, Pakistan had no option but to be peaceable; (2) the Pakistani people, at that point in time, would simply not accept

brushed aside questions on the subject.

Nawaz Sharif and Atal Behari Vajpayee met in September 1998 in New York where they had gone for the annual UN General Assembly meeting. Their foreign secretaries issued a joint statement on September 23 indicating the two governments' intention to initiate a "composite dialogue," meaning that several committees, each consisting of relevant secretaries, would begin discussing issues. Thus, the two foreign secretaries would discuss Kashmir; the defence secretaries would discuss Siachen; terrorism and drug trafficking would be taken up by the home/interior secretaries; trade by the commerce secretaries, and so forth.

In the following February, Mr Vajpayee made his famous bus trip to Lahore. He stayed two days in the city, and it seems that

his talks with Mr Nawaz Sharif went well. They agreed that their foreign ministers would meet periodically, coordinate positions to be taken on issues relating to WTO, increase cooperation in the area of information technology, and liberalize travel between the two countries.

The "Lahore Declaration" (February 21, 1999) recognized that resolution of disputes, including the one relating to Kashmir, was essential to the maintenance of peace between them. The two governments agreed also to guard against accidental use of nuclear weapons, promote CBMs, combat terrorism, and protect human rights.

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The Soviet leaders had gone out of their way to ingratiate Ayub Khan. Marshals Zhukov, Malinovsky, Sokolovsky, and other Soviet officers clicked their heels and saluted each time he walked into, or out of, a conference room or reception hall. After four days of deadlock the Soviets intervened. They conveyed it to Ayub Khan that failure of the conference to produce an agreement would embarrass them, because it would also be seen as their failure.

Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet foreign minister, told Bhutto that Pakistan should not expect to gain at the conference table what it had failed to achieve on the field of battle. Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin advised Ayub Khan to be content with peace on the basis of a return to positions the two sides had held before August 5, 1965. He accepted this advice; overruling Bhutto and Aziz Ahmad, who wanted to return home without an agreement, and signed one that said nothing about Kashmir except that the two sides had stated their respective positions on the subject.

At Simla (June 28-July 3, 1972) the Indians called upon Pakistan to recognize Bangladesh forthwith, and accept the new ceasefire line in Kashmir, now called the "line of control," as a permanent border between the two countries. The Pakistani team wanted to get back its prisoners of war (some 93,000 of them) and the territory that India had seized (5139 square miles, of which more than 500 square miles lay in the densely populated areas of Punjab). It did not want to discuss Kashmir and, in any case, it rejected the Indian proposal. The conference reached an impasse.

Seven draft agreements were exchanged but to no avail. Bhutto directed Aziz Ahmad to let it be known at the eighth round that the Pakistani delegation intended to return home that evening. And then came his famous "tea" with Mrs Gandhi at 5.00 p.m. on July 2 in her room with nobody else present. The exchange that took place here saved the conference. The two delegations were ordered back to the table after dinner, and hectic talks ensued. Mrs Gandhi and Mr Bhutto, installed in separate rooms on each side of the conference hall, instructed their respective negotiators, as need arose, over the next several hours. An agreement was sealed and signed shortly after midnight on July 3.

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the LoC as an international border or agree to the recognition of Bangladesh; (3) if he accepted the Indian demands in these respects, he would be repudiated at home and ousted from power, probably, by the generals who might be more difficult for India to deal with.

Mrs Gandhi understood a fellow-politician's problems of survival and relented. Even so, she chose to be cautious: she would return the Pakistani territory right away but keep the prisoners for a time to see how Bhutto spoke and acted in the following months.

It seems that both at Tashkent and Simla the personal factor influenced the outcome of negotiations. Ayub Khan yielded not because of compelling circumstances but because, intimidated by the Soviet rulers, he lost his nerve; because, as Herbert Feldman once put it, "the fibre of the man did not correspond to the manner of his address and was unequal to the necessities of his mission."

The Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 had ended in a stalemate, but Pakistan had come out of the 1971 war clearly as the vanquished party. Yet Bhutto did better than Ayub Khan had done, for he was not only eloquent and articulate but an astute politician, adroit, crafty, wilful, persevering, and capable of defiance. Above all, he had massive political support at home, an advantage Ayub Khan never had.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi met Benazir Bhutto on the "sidelines" of a Saarc meeting in Islamabad in December 1988, and again a few months later (July 16, 1989). The two prime ministers had meetings with their respective delegations in attendance, but they also had a brief private, one-to-one, meeting. Nothing came out of their meetings beyond routine assertions of sovereignty and equality, commitment to non-intervention in each other's internal affairs, resolve to settle disputes by peaceful means, and respect for the UN charter. Ms Bhutto was more at the giving than the receiving end.

At a dinner for Rajiv Gandhi, she saluted his "illustrious grandfather" (the late Mr Nehru) and his mother (Indira Gandhi). She urged strict adherence to the "letter and spirit" of the Simla agreement. She would support moves to keep each side from attacking the other's nuclear installations. Nothing was said or done about Kashmir and, in fact, at a joint press conference before his return to Delhi, the Indian prime minister rudely

went well. They agreed that their foreign ministers would meet periodically, coordinate positions to be taken on issues relating to WTO, increase cooperation in the area of information technology, and liberalize travel between the two countries.

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Reports attributed to Mr Niaz Naik, Pakistan's high commissioner in Delhi at the time, have it that he began secret negotiations concerning Kashmir with Mr B.K. Mishra, a confidante of Vajpayee, within days of the Indian prime minister's return from Lahore. These talks (March 3-June 27) went well but were called off abruptly when the Pakistan army began its operations in Kargil.

We all know that the Agra summit (July 14-16, 2001) did nothing to improve Indo-Pakistan relations. Two days of continuous talks between their delegations, and more than six hours of General Musharraf's private, one-to-one, discussions with Prime Minister Vajpayee, in five rounds, failed to produce even a ceremonial joint statement at the end.

I am inclined to think that personal qualifications of the principal actors may have, once again, impacted the talks at Islamabad, New York/Lahore, and Agra. Ms Bhutto-young, inexperienced, and vulnerable — may have been overawed by Rajiv Gandhi's antecedents and current position. Nawaz Sharif did not score high marks for intellectual sophistication, but his very simplicity may have inspired confidence and mellowed Vajpayee. Moreover, unlike Ms Bhutto in 1988 and 1989, Mr Sharif in 1999 commanded a huge majority in the National Assembly.

General Musharraf at Agra had taken upon himself the task of a politician without having the skills of one. The bluntness of speech for which flatterers praise him may have alienated his hosts to a point where they became loath to do business with him. This is evident from the fact that even now, almost a year and a half after the event, Mr Vajpayee is not exactly enthusiastic about having another encounter with him.

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