

SAARC - Kashmir correlation

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The 12th SAARC summit meeting held in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, on January 4-6, 2004, marked its signatures to bring new optimism among the poverty ridden people of South Asian region. Leaders of SAARC departed for their respective country after having signed a mutually agreed declaration, which manifest their resolve to work for the betterment of the people of this region. As a regional association, SAARC could not show impressive performance and failed to demonstrate valid cooperation amongst the member states.

The world saw this organization as superfluous and worthless. Hence many commentators and analysts named it as the "Dead Horse" of South Asia unable to make its mark in social, cultural and economic fields. It was frustratingly awful to see SAARC making extremely slow and sluggish progress in all its well-planned and otherwise viable projects. Why SAARC could not progress was a relevant question having straight answers that unresolved political issues override the social, cultural and economic aspects and no progress can be made in non-political areas unless the political disputes are addressed with sincerity and resolved amicably.

Progress on SAARC projects is highly and significantly correlated with the old and deeply entrenched Kashmir problem between India and Pakistan the two nuclear rivals.

Unfortunately SAARC does not permit inclusion of bilateral and political issues for discussion during its meetings of different levels and hence the association could not suggest or act as a mediator between India and Pakistan who stand ready to fight each other during all seasons and under all circumstances. 12th SAARC summit has been unique in its meeting

as it provided an opportunity for the top leaders of India and Pakistan to meet on the sidelines of SAARC and offer their willingness to engage themselves in a meaningful and sustained dialogue to resolve all outstanding issues including Kashmir.

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the use of power.

The ground realities suggest that India and Pakistan exist, as dissenting neighbours with extra qualification of becoming nuclear rivals. It is also the stark truth that both these nations are still locked on Kashmir issue, thereby, directly and indirectly influencing with negative impact the social, cultural, economic and regional cooperation or development in the region.

Having consumed and exhausted all the options to

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It has been the vision of President Musharraf to engage in peaceful, sustained and meaningful dialogue with India as all coercive methods failed to clear the negative environment leading to friction and tension between India and Pakistan who have fought three wars in the past but could not arrive at any decisive outcome through

resolve the well-ingrained Kashmir dispute between the two countries, the people of South Asian region have pinned their hopes on Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf to take bold steps to end the decades old but moribund Kashmir issue.

In fact the people of South Asia have realized that resolution of Kashmir issue has significant implications for the whole South Asian region and its vertical progression to keep

pace with the changing requirements of the world. SAARC is an ideal platform to address the multifarious problems faced by the people of South Asian region.

Surely the rational approach taken by Indian Prime Minister to express his willingness to engage in a sustained and meaningful dialogue with Pakistani top leadership to resolve all issues including Kashmir will be protected from the negative mind set and blunt hardliners in India and the process of dialogue as proposed and envisaged by President Musharraf will be allowed to meet its meaningful end. This will not only encourage optimism among the people of SAARC member states but will also end the gross injustices done to the people of Jammu and Kashmir who are being punished for demanding their rights of self-determination and expression of freedom.

Will India act wise, see the writing on the wall and resolve the Kashmir issue with sincerity? It is a vital question, which will only be answered by the rational approach taken, by Indian leadership.

The whole South Asian region remains dependent upon Indian sincerity of purpose and earnest seriousness of their concern. Should India do justice to the people of Kashmir and allow them their just rights of self-determination to decide their own future, the SAARC will automatically kickoff in its quest to realize SAARC ideals.

The poor masses in the region will also get their basic needs, a sense of protection and promising future. The world will then accord different priority to SAARC and its member states both at political and economic levels. The onus lies on the leadership. Only the time will tell us whether the Indians decide to cash the opportunity positively or otherwise. Let us hope for the best.