

Indo-Pak relations – development debate

BY IFTIKHAR AHMAD

The Islamabad Summit as compared to Agra was much better planned and organized. Homework was properly done. Certain new personalities were involved. Certain external forces were acting in the situation. However, not even the United States claimed credit for positive developments in Pakistan-India Relations.

The beauty of the 12th SAARC was the suspense, hopes, and assurances the preceded it. The Musharraf-Jamali strategy put into action by hard work of officers from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior and Information, turned out to be an effective instrument and an impressive and sincere effort for peace and prosperity of South Asia where a large number of people live below the poverty line.

It is good that Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee finally made it. As he put it, "a new chapter is opened in Indo-Pak relations". One hopes and wishes that this newfound warmth in relationship of two big partners in SAARC becomes a real source of permanent peace and stability and settlement of all disputes in the region.

President Musharraf has rightly said that the string which was broken at Agra has been repaired in Islamabad.

When I wrote my article, "Undeclared Agra Declaration", I had never found General Pervez Musharraf a disappointed man. I thought he was a rational, moderate leader and national hero, truly representing at Agra, the thinking and aspirations of common citizens of Pakistan. Naturally, the Indian leadership did

the unusual strategy that Musharraf had used by approaching the Indian media and the people. By doing so the Indian media and the people had the opportunity, first time in their lives, to understand the real sources of tension between the two countries. We know, Agra was not an opportune time as the memories of Kargil were fresh in Indian minds. There were many other negative factors in the situation at that time as well.

Things were different then. Situation has changed now. It is always

Hopefully, the win-win situation equally applies to both countries. As the President has said, "Pakistan has reached out a dialogue with India. Hopefully, the recent Pakistan-India peace initiatives would lead to the collective well being of the one-fifth humanity living in south Asia."

Pakistan needs peace for security, safety and socio-economic development; it needs to empower the poor. It needs to address the problem of underdevelopment. It needs self-sustaining and not dependent development. Peace with India and internal security are basic requirements for growth and development.

Leaders of SAARC countries aspiring for real progress have expressed the need for trust and good faith, identifying common problems: making SAARC an energetic institution to effectively adopt and implement its social charter; to maximize benefits from South Asian Free Trade Agreement, and to raise the level of people living in the region. All this depends on peace.

President Pervez Musharraf, addressing the SAARC leaders at a banquet hosted by him, underlined the need for the establishment of peace through just resolution of political disputes to accelerate economic development of the region. He further expressed the need to expand the SAARC Charter to constitute a mechanism to discuss bilateral issues at the regional level. Prime Minister Jamali, on his election as Chairman of the SAARC Conference said, "It is the stark reality of political differences and disputes that has held back prospects of real economic co-operation in South Asia". Peace in the South Asian region is a must for development. As the Pakistan President said, "we must put behind us the tarnished legacy of mistrust, bitterness and tension".

Each one of the SAARC countries has its place in a global system of social economic and political relationships. Therefore the whole world has been watching the proceedings of the conference in Islamabad and its likely outcome and impact.

Further, every SAARC country has its peculiar circumstances. Domestic situation may be directly or indi-

rectly the consequence of relationship within the region and more so the consequence of relationship with immediate neighbours as in case of India and Pakistan. While there is recognition of basic facts and situations affecting relationship, there may be disagreement over causes and also on policies that should be devised to cope with it.

The world is unevenly developed. It is crucial to ask to what extent this is the result of groups defending their interests at international, regional and national levels. Vested interests are also a major source of conflicts: political, social and economic.

As long external threats of war and internal security problems (also a function of external situation) exist, it is extremely difficult for any national government to undertake measures for social, political, and economic reforms. Under situations of increased uncertainties and conflicts, efforts for better governance and changing the structure of the economy may be frustrated. Similarly, leadership may not be able to effectively devote itself to adequately address institutional and structural problems with a view to empowering the poor.

Development is a complex process, not free of implications of (political) relations with other countries, specially with next-door neighbours. So goes the old saying, love thy neighbour.

Pakistan has paved the way for its journey to peace with development agenda and an air of self-esteem. It is time that India and Pakistan, two big neighbours in South Asia, get together and resolve all bilateral issues including Kashmir.

If the cricketing authorities of the two countries find it difficult to decide such simple matters as the venues and timings of test matches and one-day matches, political issues are much more complex to handle. But the two neighbours seem to have realized that much water has flown under the bridge. People on both sides have suffered. Concerted and sincere effort is required to make up for the lost opportunity and bring prosperity to the people.

Domestic security is a function of level and degree of threat perceptions and actual external threats. As soon as external threats diminish the domestic environment would become favourable for investment. The engine of growth starts working effectively and efficiently. Good luck Pakistan. Good luck India. Good luck South Asia.

India is certainly happy over what it has got from General Musharraf.

War against terror has not been carried to India to counter its state terrorism. India thinks that that is its internal problem. Justice has not been done. Instead India has blamed Pakistan (since September 11, 2001) of crossborder terrorism. And India has succeeded in its effort to label the Kashmiris' struggle for the right of self-determination an act of terrorism.

Second, India has taken undue advantage of the ceasefire Pakistan offered unilaterally along the line of control from 26th of November 2003. There is ceasefire on the line of control. But fire has not ceased inside the Indian held Kashmir. Indian brutalities have been intensified. However, it is heartening to hear Mr. Vajpayee say that some solution would be found of the over half a century old dispute over Jammu and Kashmir. Let us hope that a solution also acceptable to Kashmiris is made possible.

Most importantly, upbeat economy and peace with Pakistan will take India to new heights in business and industry and international market. If China has vision to be an economic superpower, India would not like to be left behind in the race. India is headed to be an economic power – a developed nation by 2020 (present growth rate is 8.4 percent). Early Indian parliamentary election is being planned to cash in on economic growth. So, it is logical that its leaders have to come to Pakistan to initiate a process of dialogue and discuss all bilateral issues, including Kashmir.

President Musharraf has already given India many concessions and assurances much ahead of formal talks. Pakistan took many confidence building measures to reduce tension and create an environment of trust between the two countries.

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