

On three parallel tracks

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WITH a rapprochement of sorts in place, Pakistan and India seem to be moving along three parallel tracks. They are consciously attempting to develop a relationship that would stand the shocks of unpleasant developments. It was such an occurrence — the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001 — that brought the two nuclear armed nations to the verge of yet another open conflict.

The near-war of 2001-2002 lasted more than a year and took a heavy economic toll on both countries. The governments in Delhi and Islamabad seem to have concluded that they cannot afford another confrontation of this type. That notwithstanding, there is a high level of probability that some hardliner groups on both sides of the border will make a serious attempt to disrupt the process that was started following the Saarc summit in Islamabad.

A terrorist attack by a Pakistan based group on some place in India cannot be ruled out. Similarly an Ayodhya mosque type incident could occur on the other side of the border, engineered by some elements in the Indian political system for whom friendly relations with Pakistan remain distasteful. It would take resolve from both Islamabad and Delhi to withstand these pressures.

It is heartening that the senior leaders of the BJP have indicated that they will fight the April 2004 national elections on the basis of their party's economic record rather than continuing animosity with Pakistan. Similarly, President Pervez Musharraf's speech to the Pakistani parliament on January 17 was a clear indication that he has set his administration's course towards creating a working relationship with India.

What is the first track on which the Pakistani and Indian teams have begun to move? A knee-jerk reaction to some unpleasant development can be prevented by the adoption of what are rightly called "confidence-building measures." The Indian government appears to have recognized that it is dangerous to completely isolate Pakistan — to build an impenetrable wall between itself and its Muslim neighbour to the north. Isolation breeds suspicion; it also strengthens those forces that have an interest in widening the gulf between the two sides. Regular contacts between the citizens of the two nations would be extremely helpful in moving along the process of reconciliation.

Given the troubled history of the subcontinent, it will take a long time to normalize relations between India and Pakistan. But the process could be hastened by confidence-building measures. They could encompass sporting events between the teams from the two countries; exchange of writers, academics, teachers, and journalists; exchange of books, magazines, newspapers, and journals; visits by musicians, movie stars and special screenings of movies made by the two countries. Such contacts should also help to prevent another "near war."

cussing bilateral issues with the Musharraf government. Finally, Islamabad reiterated that it would honour the commitment made at Simla by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that all India-Pakistan disputes would be tackled and solved through bilateral negotiations.

This is a major concession by Islamabad. On several occasions after Simla, Pakistan had attempted to internationalize the Kashmir dispute by involving a third party as a mediator. There was some hope among Pakistan's policy-makers that after 9/11 Washington may be willing to become such a party. It could play the role of a broker to do a deal between the two long-time antagonists.

Islamabad believed that it was in Washington's interest to play this role since it would get Pakistan's undivided attention as a partner in the war against international terrorism once the Kashmir problem was resolved. Or, if the US was not willing to go alone into this area, it could perhaps do it in

plenty of examples around the world to suggest that deep animosities among nations can be dissolved once trade begins to move freely.

This happened, of course, in Europe which, after two catastrophic wars in the twentieth century, is now a zone of peace. This also happened in the Mercosur, a trading arrangement among the nations in the southern cone of South America. The countries in this area had fought several wars and they continued to view one another with deep suspicion for a very long time. The birth of Mercosur helped to change this mindset.

In fact, the warming of relations between Argentina and Brazil, the two largest economies, ultimately led to both sides giving up their nuclear ambitions. The same can be said to be true for the North American Free Trade area that has brought Mexico closer to the United States and is likely to stay that way in spite of the uneven progress made by the trading arrangement during its

first ten years. In what way should SAFTA evolve? In working out a plan for its development and evolution how carefully should the founding countries look at the experience of other successful regional trading arrangements? What are the lessons that could be drawn from what has happened in other parts of the world? How much focus should be placed on moving beyond trade to other issues that have stood in the way of regional integration in South Asia? These are important questions and we will take them up in a separate

Of the many different motives that are propelling the two countries to seek rapprochement, two are compelling. On the Indian side, the ongoing conflict with Pakistan is a major distraction in its quest for global play. On this side of the border, President Musharraf has begun to appreciate how big a menace the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and jihadi groups has become.

the context of the United Nations involvement. The hard-hitting speech given in September last year by President Musharraf at the opening session of the UN General Assembly was to get that agency's attention focused once again on Kashmir. Musharraf's address provoked an equally strong response from Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Indian prime minister.

What has India offered in return for these Pakistani concessions? For the first time it has recognized that Kashmir was a central element in the uneasy relationship with Pakistan. This recognition suggests some shift away from the long-held Indian position that Kashmir is an integral part of the country and its status is not open to negotiations. In fact, the Indians have often claimed that any compromise on Kashmir would undermine what historian Anil Khilnani has called the "idea of India." That idea encompasses nation building not on the basis of any form of identity — religious, linguistic, caste, etc. — but on geography, plurality and accommodation.

According to this line of thinking, letting Kashmir leave the Indian union would weaken the "idea" and encourage other fissiparous tendencies to flourish. There are many of those in India and, the argument goes that by providing Kashmir a special treatment Delhi would encourage other groups to demand something similar for themselves.

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article at a later date. For the moment, we will return to the subject of rapprochement between India and Pakistan and discuss the very different sets of motives that persuaded the leadership on both sides of the border to begin to think in terms of launching an era of peace in the subcontinent.

Historians of deep conflicts between nations tell us that accommodation can be reached once the motives for doing so begin to coincide. The resolution of the sharp animosity between Germany and France occurred when the two countries recognized that they would gain enormously if they lifted their sights beyond narrow national interests and started to focus, instead, on the economic future of continental Europe. Once that happened, the rest was easy.

However, the further expansion of Europe has become somewhat problematic since there is a clear divergence of motives on the part of the continent's core (France and Germany) and its periphery (countries such as Portugal and Poland). The core would like to see the new institutions of the European Union develop in a way that it gives it greater weight in the arrangement than the periphery, including the ten countries about to be added to the expanded union. The peripheral countries want equality in the contemplated set-up.

Unfortunately, India's and Pakistan's motives are different in seeking come kind of accommodation. Of the many different motives that are propelling the two nations to seek rapprochement, two are compelling. On the Indian side, the ongoing conflict with Pakistan is a major distraction in its quest for global play. On this side of the border, President Musharraf has begun to appreciate how big a menace the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and jihadi groups has become.

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What is the first track on which the Pakistani and Indian teams have begun to move? A knee-jerk reaction to some unpleasant development can be prevented by the adoption of what are rightly called "confidence-building measures." The Indian government appears to have recognized that it is dangerous to completely isolate Pakistan — to build an impenetrable wall between itself and its Muslim neighbour to the north. Isolation breeds suspicion; it also strengthens those forces that have an interest in widening the gulf between the two sides. Regular contacts between the citizens of the two nations would be extremely helpful in moving along the process of reconciliation.

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The second parallel track on which the two countries have launched themselves is to find a solution to the long-enduring Kashmir problem. Pakistan has moved further on this track than India. Shortly before the Saarc summit held in Islamabad in early January, President Musharraf had hinted that Pakistan would no longer insist on a UN supervised plebiscite in Kashmir as mandated by the Security Council resolutions of the late 1940s. This was the basis of Pakistan's position for a long time. Various Pakistani governments had maintained that implementing the UN resolutions was the only way of solving the Kashmir dispute.

In the Islamabad agreement to begin negotiations between the two countries, Pakistan gave, for the first time, a pledge in writing that it will not allow its territory to be used to launch attacks on the Indian occupied Kashmir. This was a long standing demand on India's part; one that had kept it from dis-

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The third track is that of regional trade. At the time of the Islamabad summit, the seven Saarc nations agreed to work towards the creation of a Free Trade Zone in South Asia. They set themselves the target of 2007 by which time the South Asian Free Trade Area, or Safta, will come into force, allowing goods and commodities to move freely among the countries in the region. This is a good move since the trade track holds the greatest promise for bringing about peace in the South Asian subcontinent. There are

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Could these two motives be aligned in some way that they begin to be seen as a part of a plus-sum game in which neither side loses and both sides gain. That could happen if the building of trade between the countries — rather than solving the Kashmir problem — is placed at the centre of the evolving detente.

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