

# Impending India-Pakistan dialogue

*The News Pch. F.R. India 1/2/04*

**I**t has been announced that Pakistan and India will hold talks in Islamabad from Feb 16 to Feb 18th. During the first two days talks are supposed to be held at the Director General/Joint Secretary level but on the last day (18th Feb) the Foreign Secretaries would meet. This indeed is a welcome development. Not only the regional peace lovers but the international community would also be keenly watching the developments that take place during the month of February.

It seems pertinent to stress here that dialogues between the Indians and Pakistanis have taken place from time to time in which many issues including the Kashmir dispute have been discussed. The Simla Agreement, the Lahore Declaration and Agra Summit all bear testimony to periodic bilateral discussions. Pakistan goes to such dialogues with a view to resolve the disputes whereas the Indians frequently use the occasions either to extract Pakistani consent to cleverly devised Indian solutions or further delay the resolution by injecting additional complications. However, it needs to be mentioned that the prevailing atmosphere this time tends to generate more optimistic vibes than was the case in the past.

Since India-Pakistan relations are classified as conflict prone, the first major requirement appears to be the advent of a conducive atmosphere in which, at the least, the two parties express their willingness to engage each other. Undoubtedly Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee's peace initiative on April 18, 2003 and equally positive Pakistani response had provided the much needed initial start which was followed by innumerable exchange visits of parliamentarians, journalists, businessmen, labour leaders, women, students etc paving way for a vastly improved atmosphere.

Setting preconditions for any dialogue reflects a desire for negotiations on one's own terms. Dialogue between

the Indian and Pakistani governments was effectively prevented by the conditions set by the Indian government since the inconclusive dialogue at Agra. If a dialogue is made conditional then it is only rational to assume that one of the party either wants to initiate negotiations from a point of strength or is employing it as a ploy in order to overcome the complexities generated by the incumbent internal dynamics.

For any successful negotiations some form of frameworks needs to be established. As far as the India-Pakistan issues/disputes are concerned many sets of frameworks already exist. Among them two are most pronounced — the United Nations route and the bilateral pursuits. The UN approach would indeed reflect a multi-lateral approach to resolve the disputes but bilateral approach reflects the mutual desire to work out a recipe to deal with all well-entrenched irritants, issues and disputes that are impeding the advent of peace, stability and progress.

Another set of approaches consists of what has been often classified as realistic and idealistic approaches. For a pragmatic solution both sides need to take into considerations each other's sensitivities and the existing ground realities. Perhaps this is what President Musharraf frequently referred that both sides should systematically drop what is deemed to be unacceptable to the other side. For instance the Pakistanis are unlikely to accept the existing Indian position on Kashmir that Kashmir is an integral part of India whereas the Indians are unlikely to accept the application of UN resolutions to Kashmir situation. Making LoC the permanent border appears to be totally unacceptable to the Pakistanis. Almost all the responsible officials have been stressing that under no circumstances Pakistan would accept LoC as a permanent border. If they have to accept LoC how would they justify the struggle during the last 56



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years? Similarly the Indians are opposed to the application of the UN resolutions to the ongoing Kashmir dispute. They have not only steadfastly opposed the UN role in Kashmir dispute but have not missed any opportunity to de-link the dispute with UN.

The existing partition of the state is viewed by many as a forced division in which the Kashmiris were not consulted. The Indian argument that the Kashmiris have been consulted through their periodically held elections does not cut much ice with either the Kashmiris or the Pakistanis. Most Pakistanis consider APHC (All Parties Hurriyat Conference) as the true representative of the Kashmiris and not the elected government in the Indian Held Kashmir (IHK). They feel that almost all of the elections in the Indian Held Kashmir have been heavily rigged.

The Indians feel that they cannot allow the cession of IHK, as it would have a negative impact on the other separatist movements within the country. Misguided Indians also link it with the survival of Indian secularism. They insist that there will not be any further partition implying that the existing partition might be accepted. They consider that the time is on India's side. Sooner or later the Kashmiri struggle, which they allege is kept alive by the Pakistanis, would fade away. Indeed such a view reflects a refusal to accept the ground realities. Measured by any yardstick, the freedom movement in Kashmir is viewed as the product of indigenous efforts of the Kashmiris.

Another important aspect that needs to be taken into consideration revolves around well-entrenched sensitivities of the both parties. No negotiations are likely to reach a logical conclusion if the two parties are un-

willing to accommodate each other over certain sensitive aspects of the issue or dispute involved. The negotiating parties need to recognise that they may have to step down from their ardently held positions in order to provide necessary space to the other side. In congruence with the logic of negotiation processes President Musharraf has already and clearly highlighted in his four-stage formula the need to eliminate whatever is unacceptable to all the involved parties. This not only facilitates the search for common grounds but also reflects the sincerity of purpose.

**T**he ultimate goals of both India and Pakistan should be complete normalisation of relationships and the peace in the region. Indeed, both must realise that their persistent antagonism has cost them massive peace dividends. Instead of engaging in process of destabilisation both need to learn to cooperate and strengthen the existing regional organisation. Judicious approaches towards the outstanding disputes are likely to produce much more desired avenues towards peace.

The tragedy of 11th September resulted in the formation of international coalition against terrorism in which both India and Pakistan are partners. It was expected that the partners would work in cooperation against a common enemy but the Indian attempts to use the coalition for the furtherance of its own view of Kashmiri struggle had caused deterioration of relations between India and Pakistan. The Indian military build-up, which according to many analysts was primarily motivated by internal compulsions, had further intensified the dangers of a war between the two adversaries. Thus Kashmir, in many ways, has been rightly described as the most dangerous flashpoint of the likely first nuclear war. It may not be all that easy to forget the history of broken pledges and massive human right violations,

but efforts can be directed to initiate a phased dialogue enabling the parties involved to seriously work towards the resolution of their dispute.

Despite the fact that deeply entrenched suspicious and perpetual antagonism continue to bedevil Indo-Pak relations, the values of CBMs cannot be brushed aside. The primary goal of CBMs is to contribute or to reduce or in some instances, even to eliminate the causes of mistrust, fears, tensions and hostilities. Simultaneously CBMs are meant to create climate in which even the most complicated issues are subjected to concerted analysis and discussion aimed to secure their resolutions. CBMs like agreement on not striking each other's nuclear installations, preventing air space violations, permitting overflights and landings of military crafts in each other's country, advance notice of military exercises and troop movements along their mutual borders, the prior intimation of missile tests have all certainly made substantive contributions in removing some doubts and facilitating the peace processes. While the usefulness of CBMs cannot be minimised especially in terms of improving the atmosphere which is conducive to the initiation of a dialogue, the real peace dividends would accrue only after the removal of irritants and resolution of disputes.

Cognizant of the complex nature of relationships between India and Pakistan, it is reasonable to assume that it would not be all that easy to work out acceptable solutions quickly. The only situation that can produce quick normalcy is directly linked with an early solution of the Kashmir dispute. Therefore it is absolutely imperative to support a sustained dialogue. To maintain a desired level of continuity would require the earnest efforts of the parties directly involved. Similarly it is also the responsibility of the international community to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the dialogue process.