

Eight points on the agenda of the India-Pakistan detente talks

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and India began three days of talks on Monday, resolving all issues including the Kashmir issue.

Below are the eight points of the agenda likely to be discussed, according to Indian government sources.

Most of the points in one form or another were also on the agenda the last time officials from the two sides met to discuss so-called "composite" issues affecting relations — in an unsuccessful meeting on October 1998.

(Kashmir) A former princely state dominated by Muslims which is currently divided between the two rivals and claimed in full by both. The territory has been the subject of two of the three wars between India and Pakistan since their independence from British Raj in 1947.

An Islamic rebellion in Indian Kashmir has claimed more than 40,000

lives since 1989 according to Indian estimates. Separatists say almost 80,000 people have died since the launch of the revolt.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training the Islamic guerrillas. Islamabad denies the charge but says it offers moral and diplomatic support to what it calls the Kashmiris' struggle for self-rule.

Infiltration of militants from Pakistan-administered Kashmir has ebbed since November 22 when the two sides declared a border ceasefire in step with their latest spirit of detente.

Siachen glacier: The issue of a ceasefire across the Siachen glacier which overlooks Pakistan, India and China has fallen away because a truce declared between the rival armies across the Kashmiri borders is holding.

Pakistan says the glacier was in its control until 1984 when Indian troops

occupied it after Pakistani had come down from the heights during the winter.

Problems, however, continue with India arguing that maps drawn by Islamabad takes a reference point on the 23,400-foot glacier which show 10,000 square kilometres of Indian territory belonging to Pakistan.

In 1999, Pakistan linked a Siachen ceasefire to an Indian troops withdrawal from the glacier, but the talks later collapsed.

Disputed border region of Sir Creek marshes: At stake is hundreds of square kilometres of the continental shelf, believed to be extremely rich in oil and other natural resources.

The India-Pakistan boundary dispute has prevented the rivals from submitting claims under the UN Convention of Law of the Sea on the limits of their respective

shelves. India wants the boundary to be drawn straight down the middle of Sir Creek, which separates Sindh from Indian Gujarat. Pakistan favours demarcation line closer to the eastern shore of the creek, which, when extended into the sea, would give it a greater chunk of the continental shelf.

The problems is that the creek is a shifting tidal channel, whose physical geography has changed significantly since the two sides drew up their maps.

Wullar Lake in Kashmir: Unresolved dispute over Indian plans to build a barrage over the Jhelum river in Kashmir, which Pakistan argues amounts to the storage of water in contravention of a bilateral 1960 Indus-Water Treaty. The two countries reached basic agreement on the dispute in a series of eight meetings between 1987 and 1992, leaving some

minor issues to be worked out. India objects to Pakistan's insistence that the matter be discussed from scratch.

Confidence-building: Including step-by-step measures between the two sides such as the ceasefire, an end to infiltration, tranquil borders and stepped-up people-to-people contacts.

Drugs: Agree to look into illegal drug-trafficking in the region.

Trade and economic co-operation: A review of decisions taken during a South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation summit in Islamabad in December and talks on further relaxation of trading barriers.

Easing travel restrictions: A review of existing agreements which have led to the restoration of road, rail and air links and talks on a possible bilateral relaxation of visa regimes. —AFP