

# Prospect of peace

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INDIA and Pakistan have once again reiterated their resolve to move forward on Kashmir through "sustained, serious and constructive dialogue". This is what Foreign Secretary Riaz Khokhar said on his return from New Delhi after the latest round of foreign secretary-level talks. This was only the beginning of the process of "composite dialogue", he said and hoped that "despite the present given stances of both the countries, there will be efforts to continue engaging in a substantive manner till the issue is resolved". He also cautioned against engaging in hype or building up high expectations.

In their joint statement issued after the New Delhi talks, the two sides reiterated "the hope that the dialogue will lead to peaceful settlement of all bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, to the satisfaction of both sides." This expression of hope, however, sequentially follows a meaningful reference to the reassurance contained in the Islamabad joint press statement of January 6, 2004 on "carrying the process forward in an atmosphere free from terror and violence."

It would be recalled that the January 6 joint statement included a formulation which read: "Prime Minister Vajpayee said that in order to take forward and sustain the dialogue process, violence, hostility and terrorism must

would be sustained in order to make the "composite" dialogue result-oriented. The Indian side was even more upbeat in its evaluation of the talks which it described as "very positive and constructive" and "a good and hopeful beginning of a process." Both sides, in an unprecedented manner, are also complementing each other for "sincerity of commitment."

These are positive vibes which every one would welcome, particularly in the aftermath of recent exchange of somewhat unpleasant rhetoric between New Delhi and Islamabad. Nobody expected any major decisions from the latest round of talks which besides their twin-agenda focus (Peace and security including CBMs and Jammu and Kashmir) were meant to give final shape to the calendar of the meetings on the remaining six subjects, now scheduled to be held later this month.

In the context of Kashmir, no specific initiatives or proposals were expected to be launched at this preliminary stage of the "composite" dialogue. Whatever time of the two-day talks was devoted to Kashmir must have been used by both sides in reiterating

the two nuclear capable states. The most notable was the Lahore summit in February, 1999 which produced the Lahore Declaration as a major peacetime mutual undertaking covering the full spectrum of their bilateral relations and issues.

Now what next? A clear road map was drawn by President Musharraf in his press conference on January 6 stressing three main points inherent in the Islamabad Agreement: (i) need for a final settlement of the Kashmir issue; (ii) need for a "composite dialogue" to settle all issues, and (iii) the "linkage and simultaneity" in all the three areas of interest to both sides, namely, mutual consolidation of CBMs, initiation and progress of the "composite" dialogue, and Pakistan's assurance not to allow any territory under its control to be used to support terrorism in any manner.

Apparently, both sides are moving ahead as envisioned in this road map. The foreign secretaries who have already exhausted their standard briefs would now need a clear political direction to be able to probe the specifics of an "achievable" final settlement of the Kashmir issue.

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At their first meeting August as part of the "composite" dialogue, the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan will have an opportunity to add the requisite political dimension to the process of normalization and set in motion an engagement beyond reiteration of their respective declaratory positions. This would also require a serious effort in both countries to prepare their peoples for the "paradigm shift" in their Kashmir policies.

For fifty years, India and Pakistan have remained locked in a confrontational

dialogue process, violence, hostility and terrorism must be prevented. President Musharraf reassured Prime Minister Vajpayee that he would not permit any territory under Pakistan's control to be used to support terrorism in any manner. President Musharraf emphasized that a sustained and positive dialogue addressing all issues would lead to positive results."

India's new emphasis on the primacy of the Shimla Agreement is also evident in the latest joint statement which reaffirms the "determination" of both sides to implement the Shimla Agreement in letter and spirit. Pakistan has tried to balance this exclusivity of Indian approach in addressing India-Pakistan bilateral relations by managing an accompanying reference to "their commitment to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations."

The Shimla Agreement, signed under most difficult and painful circumstances in 1972, had expressed the resolve of the two countries to put "an end to the conflict and confrontation" that had marred their relations "and to work for the promotion of a friendly and harmonious relationship and establishment of durable peace in the sub-continent". In order to achieve this objective, the two governments had agreed, *inter alia*, "to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them". Pending final settlement of any of the problems between the two countries, "neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation and both shall prevent the organization, assistance or encouragement of any acts detrimental to the maintenance of peace and harmonious relations".

One must admit that the essence of the Shimla formulation is now part of the new "composite" approach in the resumed process of India-Pakistan normalization. Pakistan has undertaken not to allow any "terrorist act" from its territory. India on its part has committed itself to a sustained dialogue that will (hopefully) "lead to peaceful settlement of all bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, to the satisfaction of both sides." Needless to stress that a final settlement of the Kashmir issue is now the only unimplemented provision of the Shimla Agreement.

President Musharraf has welcomed the outcome of the latest round of foreign secretary-level talks as a "good beginning" of the "engagement process" which he hoped

their long-held positions on Kashmir. This is a ritualistic exercise for which delegations from both sides always come fully prepared and show mutual indulgence and courtesy in accommodating each other's presentation as a matter of record.

According to independent reports from New Delhi, both sides restated their briefs underscoring their basic positions and concerns related to Kashmir. As always, Pakistan's case was predicated on the centrality of the Kashmir issue whereas "terrorism and violence" remained India's major concern.

What is important is that Kashmir remains on the agenda of the ongoing dialogue as drawn up in the June 23, 1997 Islamabad joint statement and did figure in the latest talks with both sides committing themselves to a "peaceful negotiated final settlement" of this core issue. Both India and Pakistan, ever since their overt nuclearization, are under pressure from the world community to seek an end to their decades old legacy of animosity and conflict.

The current volatile environment in and around our region has deepened global stakes in early restoration of durable peace in South Asia. This would require genuine rapprochement between India and Pakistan which will come only through elimination of their basic disputes and issues.

India and Pakistan also owe it to themselves to overcome their bitter past and work together for a better future. There could be no better opportunity for them to turn a new leaf in their embittered history. It is time they reorder their priorities to be able to divert their precious and limited resources from their wasteful arms race to economic development and social progress.

Both must realize that Kashmir has been the cause of full-scale wars between them and brought them almost to the brink of another war two years ago. This is an issue with grave regional and global security implications and must be addressed through legality and justice in conformity with the aspirations of the people of Kashmir. This would remain the key to genuine India-Pakistan rapprochement.

This process would inevitably require freshness of political approach on the part of the two countries. Numerous summit-level meetings over the last few years have, no doubt, generated a mutual consensus on the imperatives of peace and normalcy between

Pakistan have remained locked in a confrontational mode because of the Kashmir dispute which besides invoking intense feelings in their peoples is inextricably linked to peace and security of the region.

The historical experiences, cultural differences, religious fervour, scars of partition, wars and conflicts, Indian desire for regional domination and hegemony, liberation struggle in Kashmir and resurgence of violence and terrorism all come together in a curious convergence in the unresolved dispute of Kashmir.

The people in both countries have suffered for too long as a result of continuing tensions and conflicts and would want this episode to come to an end now. They would welcome any innovative approach that facilitates a "practical and achievable" solution of the Kashmir issue in keeping with the legitimate interests of India, Pakistan and the Kashmiri people.

The people also know that full normalization between India and Pakistan will come gradually in step with forward movement towards a final settlement of the Kashmir issue. Meanwhile, they want their governments to take concrete steps for reduction of tensions and avoidance of conflict while building cooperative relationship in areas of mutual interest on the basis of sovereign equality, non-interference and mutual benefit.

Like India, Pakistan will soon have a technocrat prime minister whose priority will be to make Pakistan politically stable and economically strong. This vision will not be achieved without peace and stability in the region. India and Pakistan must now learn to live in peace with each other as good neighbours.

Both should capitalize on their geography and strategic location to build regional networks of gas and oil pipelines and an infrastructure of transport and communication that will bring immeasurable economic dividends to them. Depending on progress in mutual confidence, they could also explore a "no-war treaty" with a mutually agreed mechanism for peaceful settlement of their outstanding disputes and creation of conditions free of violence and conflict which would enable both countries to fully devote their resources, both human and material, to improving the lives of their peoples, particularly the poorest among them.

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