



# Future of India-Pakistan détente: reflections

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**T**he current phase of goodwill between the Subcontinent major powers is greatly due to Prime Minister Vajpayee's vision of peace and goodwill in dispute resolution than by possession of deterrence.

He made two attempts to improve India's relations with Pakistan. But April 2003 witnessed Vajpayee making his third diplomatic initiative that fortunately bore fruit. Since then, matters between the two nuclear-armed neighbours have steadily improved. On most public related matters of interest, there has been tremendous improvement, even high level of cordiality between people of the two countries. So much so that the recently concluded Cricket matches, were described as "friendship series".

The state of present goodwill has achieved the removal of the chill of hostility between the two countries. Considering that barely two years ago the armies of the two nations stood eye to eye along hundreds of miles of their frontiers, this is a welcome state of affairs. The more difficult matter is to correctly evaluate the quality and extent of progress at the "governmental" levels. An allied inquiry would be to identify which of the two governments fundamentally wants substantial détente. As I previously mentioned in an oped review:

"While those in Islamabad go on harping about Pakistan's invincibility because of Dr. Qadeer, few have the courage to admit our political backwardness, vis-à-vis for instance India, in constitutional evolution under which even the courts, let alone those in other institutions of state, are too happy to agree that on some medieval perceptions of "state

have come to Lahore in January 1999 and to go on to the Minar-a-Pakistan and accept the "nationhood" of this country. Also, the language used by him in talking of Pakistan has never been of the variety to hide any such animus belli.

Indeed after the 9/11 episode, Vajpayee did not utilize Kargil or any matter from a possible "hostile" perspective that could have embarrassed Musharraf's volte-face on Islamabad's long-standing support of the Taliban. Vajpayee has been substantially sincere in approaching his country's relations with Islamabad *de novo* with a view to the establishment of genuine cordiality between the two countries.

The Musharraf regime, on the other hand was *prima facie* anxious after 9/11 not to further antagonize India for problems relating to its legitimacy. It could not afford a confrontation of a political kind with both the secular forces and the religious ones, as well as, from across the eastern borders of the country at the same time. It was thus a political necessity that persuaded the Musharraf regime to become 'friendlier' with India. To ensure that in the much-changed international political environment since 9/11 Pakistan retained American support.

Do you see a serving military officer running a country's administration that has the pretension of calling itself "democratic"? Premier Jamali calls a serving military officer of the country his "boss". No democratic government in the world worth its name can possibly indulge in such farcical rhetoric.

Pakistan's peace with India will also resultantly lead to a clamor that it reduces the present size of its army establishment, which is a huge bur-

necessity" Constitutions can be torn asunder at any time by a local military commander." (The Nation, 21/3/04)

Here in lies, in my view the genesis of the answer to the question that whether the current detente is for real and will last? Can a compromise between representative and an authoritarian regime take place? The answer is connected with the relevant characteristics of the two states that may now be very briefly analysed.

India has the largest working democracy in the world. Its state institutions work within their allotted constitutional spheres. It has many large minorities and has resultantly difficult problems. There are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan. Minorities have asserted that they have badly suffered. Since last few years, India has a booming economy. In addition to the information technology this region has made astounding strides towards excellence in the manufacture of advanced biomedicines. This is amply reflected by growth rate of over 8 percent in its economy.

Pakistan, on the other hand, has most unsettled political processes, a non-existent observance of peoples' rights, weak state institutions including judiciary, serious ethnic problems and a politically minded army leadership that has repeatedly indulged in coup d'état.

The Musharraf regime has, accordingly, an unending battle to wage for its own "legitimacy"! In the economic domain, the decline in international interest rates and effects of 9/11 has combined to produce a bulging reservoir of foreign exchange. However, industry and investment are stagnant, and with inflation rising, poverty has actually increased from where it stood in 1999 when Musharraf took over. With such salient characteristics of the two countries in mind how would peace prospects be viewed by Delhi and Islamabad?

As far as India is concerned, politically it has to genuinely cherish such goals that ensure tranquility of relations with Islamabad. In addition, its economy will clearly benefit by a decrease in its non-development expenditures. But there is a school of thought that maintains that the new Indian initiative was based on pragmatic grounds of domestic political compulsions.

The BJP led administration was cognizant of the fact that apprehensions existed in the rest of the Indian population, particularly in the Muslims of its staunch right wing religious sympathies. According to this view, the present Indian attitude is fundamentally guided by the electoral priorities that the BJP is currently faced with and not with any deeper considerations emanating from a sense of improving relations with Islamabad *per se*.

I discount this thinking. Had such been the case, Vajpayee would never

den on the national exchequer. Islamabad has already, on numerous occasions, been advised by world monetary and financial institutions to decrease its non-development expenditures. Poverty *per se* is the largest source of unstable social conditions and the constantly deteriorating law and order situation that prevails in the country. Can a military government decrease its own influence in the country?

As such it is not merely a coincidence that in the last dozen years on two different occasions when the purely civilian leadership, tried to increase its level of friendship with India, it failed! We cannot also be unmindful of the reality that when the two previous major wars between the two countries took place, the army leadership had the reins of political control in Islamabad. Despite Musharraf's overtures of everlasting friendship to Vajpayee, when the crunch time arrives, the present Pakistani Government would not be as swift in moving ahead as the time may demand.

In sum, therefore, as long as Pakistan does not have a validly elected Government working under the Constitution, inter-governmental cordiality presently seen involving Pakistan is more an outcome of opportunistic outlook by Islamabad rather than a genuinely felt need of the history of this age. But one factor over which the Musharraf regime cannot probably reverse the process the current enhanced peoples' contact.

In this context, the role that Washington might play is really crucial. As the sole superpower, it has larger interests in this region to see the relations between India and Pakistan on harmonious footing. The American Government has already described India as "an emerging power". With Pakistan's "strategic need" for the US and the issue of nuclear proliferation far from closed, there are fair chances, that despite the pessimistic possibilities pointed out by me, Washington may ensure that the blossoming of tranquil relations between the two countries is not jeopardized by current military rulership.

More ominous for betterment of India-Pakistan relations is the unpalatable prospect of Musharraf getting more directly involved in politics by assuming the presidency of the ruling Muslim party. If this occurs, we must remember that elections are different from military dictatorships.

While the later can ignore "popularity" aspects of incumbency, elections in Pakistan may require to varying degrees an anti-US and Indian platform. While Washington may ignore such rhetoric, Vajpayee may not be able to. To sum up, good relations with India, from Pakistan's perspectives objectively, are dependent on the respect and prevalence of Rule of Law and Constitutionalism in Islamabad.