

Tackling the labyrinth

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Detente between India and Pakistan, after more than two years of military stand-off, and what comes with that, will be perceived variously by different people. Politicians from both sides are bound to take the new initiative with scepticism, due to past failures and the day-to-day changes in rhetoric to satisfy the local populace. The traders community would naturally view the new development in terms of the advantages and the threats to local products. Smugglers — of which there is an abundance — have already started adjustments in their merchandise and channels of communication. The custodians of foreign policy must be charting the future course keeping in mind the reactions of the world at large, and especially the major powers. India and Pakistan are geographically so close to each other and their history is so inter-twined that every section of their population and every aspect of their life is affected by a change in the posture of the other country. This impact is independent of the ideological, religious and cultural differences between the two. It is the natural outcome of the economic and social forces working at the level of the common people and the sense of security and peace that every man and woman, anywhere in the world would crave for, when threat comes from their immediate neighbour.



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Genesis of the problems between India and Pakistan has been analysed so extensively and so often that not much can be added. The recent overtures for some peace between the two countries will bear fruit only if the two sides are really sincere about their efforts for reconciliation on basic disputes. There have been so many major and minor armed conflicts between the two countries during the last fifty-six years and the atmosphere is so dense with mistrust that even small incidents — even verbal rhetoric can spoil the environment for peace and take the dialogue between the two wary neighbours back to where it started. Unlike most other situations of this type in various parts of the world, Indo-Pakistan animosity is scarred by four wars resulting in loss of life from both sides, and dismemberment of one of the parties. The ever-smouldering hostilities in Kashmir always serve as a grim reminder of the unstable and inflammable material present on the ground. Frequent exchanges of fire between border guards are a living attestation of the magma boiling under the surface.

Negotiating peace in such an ambience can be very testing. If the two teams manage to keep their cool and prevent the dialogue from derailing the ghosts of past encounters can always spoil the tempo. One cannot help having some scepticism about the envisaged round of detente, due to misgivings about the resolution of fundamentals like the Kashmir issue, carnage of Muslims in Gujarat and other parts of India, security concerns of the two countries, guarantees against the use of nuclear weapons, non-proliferation of WMDs, suppression of terrorist activity directed against each other, cessation of hostile propaganda, etc. etc. Each one of these issues has the potential of fomenting public sentiments against reconciliation and granting concessions to the other nation. Public demonstrations on any issue can spark off a chain of events which can destroy the prospects of attaining a semblance of even-headedness in the sub-continent. It will require the creation of as many pro-reconciliation groups as possible, in both the countries. Academic, professional, cultural, political, legislative gatherings of like-minded people can evolve broad-based movements which will be the best guarantee for a sustained and rewarding process of creating genuine understanding between the people and the governments of these long-feuding nations.

Despite the real and the hypothetical apprehensions, there seem to have emerged an appreciation of the circumstances prevailing in the two countries — in fact the region and the world — which point to the need to resolve irritants and develop a plan for prosperity of the people, with a realistic time table.

One would count six factors which should aid in attaining nor-

malcy in relationship between India and Pakistan in the immediate future. First: The people are getting exasperated by religious extremism in all its forms. There is a growing realisation that extremism and terror associated with it will not be stemmed unless in-

stability created by continuous strife between the two countries is eliminated. Illegal activity along the border is encouraged by non-cooperation between the respective border guards, intelligence activities, sabotage, and most of all, the provocations by the two establishments. People would like to see these factors vanish. Second: Citizens of both the countries may not express it for altruistic reasons, but families and friends of the soldiers fallen in hostilities cannot forget the loss of their dear ones. Fears for continued losses convince more people about the need for permanent peace, and the safety of their soldiery. Third: There is an increasing awareness of the expenditure on armed forces on red alert all the time. Neither India, nor Pakistan have any imminent danger from any quarters — except each other. If they settle their differences, the size of the standing armed forces can be curtailed, saving huge amounts of funds which can be diverted to development activities. The two countries, also, will have to address the popular apprehension that the armed forces would resist efforts for peace because it would render them redundant. Only the top brass of the armed forces can counter this thinking. But it is crucial to obliterate it for an unburdened dialogue.

Fourth: India and Pakistan have reached a stage in economic development where they would like to benefit from the proximity of each other for trade, exchange of experience, research in science and technology and a host of other fields. Fruitful cooperation and gains from spatial proximity, however, are not possible to achieve without open and unrestricted communication which is possible only through friendly agreements and understanding. Fifth: Human Resource Development is an area in which the two countries can accrue great benefit by specialising in their areas of strength. It will be swift, more suitable to students from the region — and by far, less costly. Presently, the exchange of teachers, students, research scholars from the two countries is almost non-existent due to restrictions and the treatment meted out by security agencies of their own as well as the other country. Normal relationship should open this highly rewarding area for mutual benefit of the two nations.

Sixth: The wide-ranging global changes in the political, economic, social and strategic fronts after 9/11 incidents and military activity in Afghanistan and Iraq have changed the role of world agreements and institutions. This is going to result in the need for new regional and sub-regional economic, technological and social cooperation, and in many cases, strategic pacts. India and Pakistan are a huge sub-region with varied resources and experience. Whether extremist elements in their countries like it or not, they will have to join hands — may be along with some other countries of the region — to counter the global economic and military onslaught of neo-imperialist powers poised to dominate the world.

To conclude, the great opportunity to solve existing problems, besides reaping the rewards of cooperation, and strengthening ourselves against intrusion from outside must not be missed. To start with, the two countries should stop hostile propaganda, avoid creating irritants and persuade respective public leaders, opinion makers, and the media to desist from indulging in arrogant rhetoric and raising tempers.

It goes without saying that the most important pre-requisite for the success of any negotiations between India and Pakistan is that both governments must have complete consensus among their departments, agencies and major political parties. In the past, contradictory statements and the challenges thrown to negotiating teams by their own compatriots created much bad blood.