

# A hazy vision of peace

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TODAY the foreign policy and security establishments of Pakistan and India are unable to see the woods for the trees. Most of their time is spent in meticulously maintaining the level of confrontation they inherited from yesteryear. They have not yet begun to fathom the yearnings and vision of peace and normality.

No vision of the future either for the teeming billions or for themselves as rulers has yet been formulated by them. They seem much too embroiled in reacting to what the other does. They take great pains in determining the exact measure of their reaction. It has to be commensurate with the action of the other — bus for bus, train for train, air flight for air flight, visa for visa. This ruling principle of inflicting petty tit-for-tat in the conduct of relations between the two countries squarely stands in the way of evolving a vision of peace.

I remember the day in 2000 arguing with Pakistan's minister of interior my plea to permit a delegation of Pakistanis to cross the border at Wagah on foot to attend a convention in India. He was a senior civil service officer acting as a minister following the dismissal of an elected government. The argument that India would allow our entry made no impression on him. For him the Indian side allowing Pakistanis was not enough to allow the Pakistanis to go. He said only when the Indian government allows the Indians to cross at Attari, he would allow the Pakistanis to cross the Wagah.

Consider things more recent. Last January, an Indian peace activist discovered that a member of parliament of any Saarc country does not need a visa to enter the territory of any other member country. All that she or he needed was a sticker stamped on the passport declaring that the holder was a member of parliament. Peace activists in both countries welcomed the discovery and made plans to receive delegations from the other side.

A delegation of members of the Indian parliament was scheduled to come to Pakistan. The visit was to be followed by a visit of the members of Pakistani parliament to India. Months passed, the arrival of the delegation from India continued to be delayed. Some concluded that the government of India was in the way. The Pakistani delegation decided not to wait for the Indians to come first, and pressed on. The government of Pakistan remained neutral — neither encouraging nor discouraging the visit.

When only a few days were left for the Pakistani delegation to leave for India, a section of the Indian hosts urged the Pakistanis to postpone the visit for a while. They did not want the visit to be cancelled, but only delayed. It was presumed that the advice

originated in their government. Since, the dates had already been changed, not once but twice, the Pakistanis could not afford to change it for a third time and decided to go ahead with their private peace offensive.

Islamabad was not to be left behind. As Pakistanis were about to leave for India they were asked by their government to postpone the visit. Presumably the underlying idea was that if Pakistan would stop Pakistani MPs going to India at the request of India, then India would also stop the Indian MPs coming to Pakistan at Pakistan's request. Apparently, the two governments were agreed on discouraging the members of the two parliaments to be a party, in any independent way, to contribute to the process of peace making. The domain of the governments, meticulously, to regulate their relations could not be allowed to be disturbed by

request the Speaker of Punjab Assembly to entertain the visitors. At Islamabad, the Chairman of the Senate and the leader of the PML(Q) volunteered to entertain the Indian delegation at a dinner.

On the morning of the departure of the Indians from Delhi, the MPs of the BJP pulled out of the delegation although they had attended the press conference the evening before. It was a blow in the wrong direction. As the visit of the MPs (June 17 to 25), progressed fabulously, the tit-for-tat reaction from the side of the Pakistani establishment emerged on the delegation's last day in Lahore. Neither the invitation from the Punjab chief minister nor from the Speaker of the Punjab Assembly materialised. A volley of angry besieging telephonic exchanges between Lahore and Islamabad and within Islamabad revived the invitation.

The dinner given by the speaker was attended by many ministers and legislators.

At Islamabad, the leader of the Muslim League (Q) who was to host a dinner in honour of the Indian MPs left Pakistan without leaving instructions as to who would officiate in his place. The fate of the dinner hung in balance. However, some Pakistani legislators of ML(Q) were successful in persuading their vice-president to host the dinner. Lo and behold, the printed and issued invitation was

cancelled by phone on the day of the dinner by the vice-president.

In the end ML(Q) legislators had to fulfil the obligation undertaken by their leaders. Furthermore, the Sindh chairman of the Senate, who was also acting as President of Pakistan in those days, as well as the chairman of the ruling coalition in Sindh, stood their ground and refused to be a party to the pettiness of the establishment.

In the face of the overwhelming wish of the people to cross the border and visit the other side and of the media of both the countries to freely perform its function, the establishments seem to be at a loss what to do. They do not know how to cope with the rising pressure of the people and their elected representatives.

While a large, powerful delegation of Indian parliamentarians and senior media persons has made it, the officials are not yet ready to let go on their hold on somewhat weaker entities. When a high official of the government of Pakistan learnt that the MPs could cross the border without obtaining a visa, his surprise was immense. "My God, Dr Sahib, the entire Pakistani parliament would be on its way to India", he exclaimed. As of now, members of Pakistan parliament are unable to get the sticker stamped on their passports which will allow them to cross from one border of a Saarc country into another. But this shall not last.

If only peace lovers would continue to mobilize the people on both sides of the border, the government shall have to yield. They have no other option.

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non-government actors. That is why there is such contempt for tracks 2 and 3 in government quarters.

The visit of the Pakistani parliamentarians from May 8 to May 15 turned out to be a roaring success. They discovered a huge peace constituency in India. All important political parties, barring the ruling coalition, warmly welcomed the visitors. The Indian media gave fantastic coverage. However, a high official of the government of Pakistan denigrated the visit as the government at Delhi and the ruling coalition had remained aloof.

Following the highly successful visit of the Pakistani MPs to India, a group of peace-promoting Indian parliamentarians braced for a visit to Pakistan. The group included members from all important political parties including the BJP. Pakistanis made elaborate arrangements for the reception of the Indian visitors at Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi. The estimated cost of the arrangements of over Rs 800,000 proved to be no problem. Large and small donations in the form of cash and picking up the bills came in generously. The hotel chain that housed the guests heavily discounted its rates.

Opposition parties, NGOs and private sector promised all help in meeting and entertaining the visitors. The response from the government and other political parties and leaders was also generous. The leader of the ruling coalition in Sindh promised a dinner for the visiting MPs. The chief minister Punjab promised to host a dinner himself or