

Pak. For relations - India Nation 13.8.03 Short steps on a long road

BY DR RASHID AHMAD KHAN

The slow pace of the normalisation process between Pakistan and India could also be explained by the fact that the countries have deliberately opted for a step-by-step approach.

announcement of April 18 initiative by Indian Prime Minister Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee for the resumption of talks between India, the two countries have covered distance on the long road to normalisation relations. The only tangible development regard are the restart of Lahore-Delhi and the appointment of new High Commissioners between Pakistan and India in Islamabad and New Delhi respectively. The two countries are, however, talks on the resumption of air and rail links on 27 and 28 in Islamabad. These dates agreed by Pakistan and agreed to by India's High Commissioner took up his assignment in New Delhi. The two countries are also at foreign secretaries level structured bilateral issues after UN General Assembly in September.

In an interview with BBC, Pakistan's Prime Minister Mr Zafarullah Jamali admitted that the pace of India normalization was slow; but he said that Pakistan was responsible for that. On the other hand, Pakistan was prompt in responding to India and had implemented more confidence building measures than its neighbour. Pakistan is disappointed over Indian refusal to respond to Pakistani request for a ministerial level that would cover all issues, including Jammu and Kashmir. India, on the other hand, has moved more in taking up non political issues as necessary step to create trust environment for taking up difficult issues like Kashmir at a later stage.

India, however, rejected this approach and said that talks must be in the form of structured dialogue, making it clear that India would never allow the Kashmir dispute to be a precondition for talks. Pakistan, it is learnt, is keen for early ministerial level talks and for this purpose may suggest to New Delhi two or three times in September. In case of a positive response from India, these talks could be held in New Delhi as Pakistan is already hosting expert-level talks for the resumption of communication

between the two countries. The slow pace of the normalization process between India and Pakistan could also be explained by the fact that the countries have deliberately opted for a step-by-step approach, instead of holding high level meetings without any homework. In the two countries learnt from Agra summit held in July 2001 between Prime Minister Mr Vajpayee and President Musharraf proved that without prior preparations. More important, however, is the fact that the two countries have their open commitment to follow the path of normalization in South Asia, are not to trust each other. Their relations are marked by friction and occasionally suffer setbacks.

Between accusations and counter accusations, subversion and hostile acts. For instance, India continues to accuse Pakistan of carrying out infiltration in Kashmir. Pakistan denies the charge and insists that there is neither

any infiltration across the LoC, nor Pakistan is maintaining any training camps for the militants on its territory. Recently tension between Pakistan and India rose again when Pakistan accused India of carrying out terrorist activities in Pakistan through its recently established consulates in Kandhar and Herat. India protested against the allegation; but Pakistan reiterated its accusation asking India to desist from using its consular facilities in Afghanistan against Pakistan. Bilateral relations between the two countries again suffered a setback when Pakistan refused to give India transit facility to send wheat to Afghanistan.

In contrast with official go-slow attitude on both sides, civil society in Pakistan and India is relentlessly working for the promotion of goodwill and understanding between the two countries by organizing exchange visits of members of business community, traders, parliamentarians, media men and intellectuals. A delegation of Pakistan's Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) led by its Chairman, Senator Ilyas Bilour visited India a couple of months ago and had useful exchange of ideas with their Indian counterparts on how to promote trade and economic cooperation between Pakistan and India.

In June a delegation of Indian Parliamentarians led by well-known Indian journalist and a great champion of Pak-India friendship, Mr Kuldeep Nayar visited Pakistan. The visit was sponsored by People's Forum for Friendship and Peace between Pakistan and India, and the delegation in addition to having met a cross section of journalists and academicians in Islamabad, also went to Lahore and Karachi where the members of delegation interacted with Pakistani intellectuals, journalists and political leaders. A similar delegation of Pakistani Parliamentarians had earlier visited India. Both the Pakistani and Indian delegations had visited each other's country in non-official capacity; but the visits had helped establish channels of communication for a better understanding of each other's views on contentious issues. As a result of these visits removed many misperceptions that existed because of the lack of communication between the peoples of the two countries.

But official apathy still persisted. For example, the Parliamentary delegation from Pakistan was cold-

shouldered by the Indian official circles and the ruling BJP as well as ignored by Indian media. The Indian Parliamentary delegation during their visit in Pakistan sought an appointment with Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri, but could not get it. Both Pakistani and Indian delegations were disappointed by official apathy and were constrained to reach the conclusion that there was a lack of seriousness at official level in both Pakistan and India to promote goodwill and accelerate the process of normalization. But Maulana Fazalur Rehman's visit was an exception. He received extensive coverage in the Indian media and was received by the Indian Prime Minister Mr Vajpayee and Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani.

Maulana Fazalur Rehman who heads his own faction of Jamiatul Ulemai Islam (JUI) had gone on an unofficial visit to India at the invitation of Darul Uloom Deoband. He was accompanied by important leaders of JUI, including Hafiz Hussain Ahmad, who is a member of the Upper House (Senate) of Pakistan. Maulana Fazalur Rehman's statements in India created a lot of controversies, but he remained stuck to his position, as he had expressed it while in India on Kashmir and Pakistan-India relations. Regarding Kashmir he had said that the dispute should be settled bilaterally through talks as provided in the Simla Agreement. His categorical statements that there should be no third party mediation and that his party did not sponsor any Mujahideen group in Kashmir were significant in the context of escalation of violence in the valley.

On the level of people to people contact, Maulana Fazalur Rehman's visit was a great success as he held meetings with not only the members of the ruling party, but also with the top leadership of VHP and RSS. Maulana Fazalur Rehman's visit has brought about such a qualitative change in the political climate of Pakistan-India relationship that a larger and much more broadly representative Indian delegation is due to arrive in Pakistan this month. What is more significant is that the members of the Indian delegation are likely to be received by President Musharraf and Prime Minister Jamali as well as Foreign Minister Mr Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri.

There is no doubt that the efforts of civil society in both Pakistan and India have led to the creation of unprecedented high level of goodwill and hope for closer relations between the two countries. There are also strong political, economic and strategic compulsions for the two countries to shun confrontation and make peace. But would the ground realities in the region, particularly the present status of Pak-India relations permit the goodwill generated through the efforts of civil society to transform into tangible and concrete improvement in the state-to-state relations between Pakistan and India? Pakistan and India, Prime Minister Jamali has observed, have no other option except peace. It means that the two countries will ultimately learn to live in peace; but how long will it take? That is the question every concerned citizen has in his or her mind.

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Short steps on a long

BY DR RASHID AHMAD KHAN

Since the announcement of April 18 initiative by the Indian Prime Minister Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee for the resumption of talks between Pakistan and India, the two countries have covered only a small distance on the long road to normalisation of bilateral relations. The only tangible developments in this regard are the restart of Lahore-Delhi bus service and the appointment of new High Commissioners of Pakistan and India in Islamabad and New Delhi, respectively. The two countries are, however, set for talks on the resumption of air and rail links on August 27 and 28 in Islamabad. These dates were proposed by Pakistan and agreed to by India after Pakistan's High Commissioner took up his assignment in New Delhi. The two countries are also likely to hold foreign secretaries level structured talks on bilateral issues after UN General Assembly session in September.

In a recent interview with BBC, Pakistan's Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Jamali admitted that the process of Pak-India normalization was slow; but he denied Pakistan was responsible for that. On the contrary, he said, Pakistan was prompt in responding to the initiative from India and had implemented more confidence building measures than its neighbour had done. Pakistan is disappointed over Indian delay in responding to Pakistani request for composite talks on lower level that would cover all issues, including Jammu and Kashmir. India, on the other hand is interested more in taking up non political issues like trade first as necessary step to create trust and better environment for taking up difficult and complex issues like Kashmir at a later stage.

Pakistan has, however, rejected this approach and insists that the talks must be in the form of structured and sustainable dialogue, making it clear that Islamabad would never allow the Kashmir dispute to be sidelined. Pakistan, it is learnt, is keen for early start of foreign secretary-level talks and for this purpose Islamabad may suggest to New Delhi two or three dates in September. In case of a positive response from India, these talks could be held in New Delhi as Pakistan is already hosting expert-level talks in Islamabad for the resumption of communication links.

The slow pace of the normalization process between Pakistan and India could also be explained by the fact that the countries have deliberately opted for a step-by-step approach, instead of holding high profile top-level meetings without any homework. This is the lesson the two countries learnt from Agra, when the summit held in July 2001 between Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf proved a futile exercise without prior preparations. More importantly, however, is the fact that the two countries, despite their open commitment to follow the road to peace and normalization in South Asia, are still not ready to trust each other. Their relations are not free from friction and occasionally suffer setbacks.

There have been accusations and counter accusations of terrorism, subversion and hostile acts. For example, India continues to accuse Pakistan of carrying out cross-border infiltration in Kashmir. Pakistan has denied this charge and insists that there is neither

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any infiltration across the LoC, nor Pakistan is maintaining any training camps for the militants on its territory. Recently tension between Pakistan and India rose again when Pakistan accused India of carrying out terrorist activities in Pakistan through its recently established consulates in Kandhar and Herat. India protested against the allegation; but Pakistan reiterated its accusation asking India to desist from using its consular facilities in Afghanistan against Pakistan. Bilateral relations between the two countries again suffered a setback when Pakistan refused to give India transit facility to send wheat to Afghanistan.

In contrast with official go-slow attitude on both sides, civil society in Pakistan and India is relentlessly working for the promotion of goodwill and understanding between the two countries by organizing exchange visits of members of business community, traders, parliamentarians, media men and intellectuals. A delegation of Pakistan's Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) led by its Chairman, Senator Ilyas Bilour visited India a couple of months ago and had useful exchange of ideas with their Indian counterparts on how to promote trade and economic cooperation between Pakistan and India.

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