

Paths to Peace Process

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The 12th SAARC summit held in Islamabad from January 4-6, 2004, and the holding of meetings between the Indian and Pakistani leaders in the sidelines of that summit resulted into positive developments in the realm of regional cooperation in South Asia on the one hand and Indo-Pak normalization process on the other. One cannot have high hopes from the events which occurred in Islamabad in the first week of January this year, but one thing is certain: the undercurrents of Indo-Pak relations are moving in the right direction notwithstanding bitterness of the past, particularly because of the events taking place after September 11 and December 13, 2001.

On April 18, 2003, the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at his first-ever public meeting in Srinagar extended his hand of friendship to Pakistan by saying, "it is possible to make a new beginning, but it depends on Pakistan. We will see what concrete steps Pakistan takes. I have extended the hand of friendship and want to see how Pakistan replies to it. Cross border terrorism must end. Talks can be opened on all subjects, including Jammu and Kashmir. I hope that from across the border, we will get a proper response, and we will be able to move ahead." With his announcement a new pattern was set into motion in Indo-Pak relations. Pakistan positively responded to Vajpayee's offer and expressed its readiness to give new thoughts to the fragile peace process with New Delhi. It kept the ball rolling and now one can see the implications of Vajpayee's peace initiative vis-à-vis Pakistan. In order to strengthen his offer of friendship to Pakistan, the Indian Prime Minister made it clear that it was his last effort and warned of serious consequences if his initiative met the fate of past endeavour for peace with Islamabad.

On April 24, 2003, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf welcomed Vajpayee's initiative for the resumption of talks. While talking to newspaper editors and senior journalists in Islamabad he gave a positive response to the hand of friendship extended by the Indian Prime Minister to Pakistan. He made it clear that, "I do not want to say anything more. It is a good beginning. No body has won and nobody has lost. Both have won. Frankly, I think, Mr. Vajpayee's gesture is genuine." Prime Minister, Zafarullah Khan Jamali responded to the offer of talks promptly and said, "I see light and we must move forward." Jamali also held telephonic conversation with Vajpayee on April 28 and offered to visit India in the best interest of peace and stability in South Asia. He welcomed Vajpayee's offer and extended him invitation to visit Pakistan and asked the Indian Prime Minister to resolve outstanding issues through dialogue. Since then much

has happened in the realm of Indo-Pak ties and a number of positive developments have taken place between the two neighbours. Starting from the appointment of High Commissioner for the two countries to the resumption of bus, air and rail links to the visit of several governmental and non-governmental delegations to each other countries since June this year, some positive climate has been created. Most important, the unilateral announcement of ceasefire made by the Pakistan President along the Line of Control from November 26, 2003, also contributed significantly in diluting the atmosphere of tension and confrontation between the two countries. The holding of SAARC summit in Islamabad also helped in changing the political climate of South Asia as the two major regional countries were able to create some betterment in their relations.

However, the spell of relative normalization in Indo-Pak relations should not mean that the threat of derailment of their relations has ceased to exist. Peace Process is still a distant goal, if not a dream for India and Pakistan, because the two countries are still far behind in creating the right environment for launching a plausible process of negotiations.

This paper will examine paths to peace process in Indo-Pak relations by examining following important issues:-

1. What are the requirements of Indo-Pak peace process and how such requirements can be accomplished?
2. Why India and Pakistan have not been able to unleash a plausible peace process?
3. What are the major impediments in Indo-Pak peace process and how these impediments could be removed?
4. How the developments taking place in Indo-Pak relations can help peace process between the two countries?

Requirements of Peace Process

Peace process could be defined as an initiative taken by warring parties for normalization in their tense relations through a sustained process of dialogue. Conceptually speaking, peace process is an uphill task in which following requirements must be taken into account:

- Concerned parties need to understand each other's position.
- Steps to reduce mistrust and suspicions, discourage hostile propaganda must be taken.
- There should be an emphasis on areas of cooperation, rather than the areas of conflict.
- Concerned parties should strive for a mutual win-win situation.
- They should exercise patience and restraint in the conduct of negotiations.
- They should demonstrate political will to start the process of talks.
- They need to adopt a flexible approach on contentious issues.

- They should encourage a moderate approach in the process of negotiations and sustain efforts for a settlement despite stalemate.

Most important, for a successful peace process, it is imperative that tension along the borders should be reduced and restrictions on the movement of people, trade and other areas of interaction should be minimised. Broadly speaking, in peace process, conducive environment is essential in order to keep the momentum of talks till the time a final settlement is reached.

There are so many examples to prove that without the above stated requirements of peace process, it becomes difficult for the parties concerned to expect a plausible outcome from such a process. If the extremist and hard line elements are allowed to continue with their negative politics, derailment and failure of peace process cannot be prevented. To a large extent, peace processes in Cambodia, Namibia, South Africa, Northern Ireland and Egyptian-Israeli cases had followed the requirements discussed earlier but even in such case studies, there were moments of gloom and pessimism. Peace process cannot be imposed but is the outcome of a feeling shared by the conflicting parties that they have reached the point of no return and they have no option but to abandon the policy of confrontation and start the process of dialogue in order to reach settlement on contentious issues. Till the time, there exists a feeling in party A or party B that they can win at the expense of each other, it becomes quite difficult to launch a peace process. Awareness among the policy makers, domestic pressure and external influence also helps in initiating a peace process resulting in breakthrough in hostile relationship of the concerned states. Peace is an end and the process of dialogue is used to accomplish that end. Many a time, there is marginal feeling among conflict parties or states to launch a peace process but the moment there is a realization in their minds that enough is enough and something concrete should be done to break the vicious cycle of cold war and confrontation, the stage is set for a process of dialogue and negotiations. Hence, one cannot undermine the importance of ripe moment in a peace process.

The question is how the requirements of peace process are applicable in case of India and Pakistan? Is there a peace process between the two antagonistic neighbours? Can there be a ripe moment for launching peace process and can the prevailing positive environment in Indo-Pak relations be similar to a ripe moment? If the requirements of peace process are taken into account, one gets the idea that the two countries are far behind in launching such a process. Some of the realities which exist in the realm of Indo-Pak relations prove the absence of a genuine peace process between the two neighbours because,

1. There is a feeling shared by the hard line or hawkish elements of India and Pakistan that they can win and do not require talks which can compromise on their established positions. A non-compromising attitude by the established circles of New Delhi and Islamabad is a major reason why peace process has failed to take off. Extremist

elements thrive on incidents of violence and terrorism and convince people that following a moderate position on issues impacting on “national security” may be counter productive and endanger “national interests.” Such a situation is the outcome of a weak civil society and the marginalization of moderate elements. Kashmir is a classical example to prove how the extremist elements of India and Pakistan have managed to prevent a solution which would result into a positive change in relations between the two countries.

2. The right environment which requires reduction of mistrust and suspicion is also not present between India and Pakistan. Despite the positive developments in their relations, one can find the two countries far from creating a conducive environment for meaningful cooperation. Despite the resumption of normal diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan, one can still see hostile elements influencing both print and electronic media and also the policy-making apparatus of the two countries to a large extent.
3. Still people to people interaction, normalization in trade and other areas of relations is not stable at the Indo-Pak level. After the events of December 13, 2001 when a new phase of Indo-Pak hostility began till April 18, 2003 when the Indian Prime Minister offered the resumption of normal relations with Pakistan, Islamabad-New Delhi relations were at the lowest ebb. But, still the two countries have not taken the first step for launching a genuine peace process.
4. As far as unresolved contentious issues are concerned, the level of flexibility which should have been expressed by India and Pakistan in order to give some credence and momentum to positive environment for a peace process is also quite low. Sometimes, the Indian leadership comes up with an innovative proposal to deal with contentious issues and sometimes Pakistani leaders present new proposals to break the Gordian knot in their relations with India. On December 17, 2003, President Musharraf in an interview given to Reuters talked about leaving aside the UN resolutions on Kashmir if India agrees to unleash the process of dialogue with Islamabad on the Kashmir conflict. But, soon, he had to issue clarifications that his country’s stand on the centrality of the Kashmir conflict in Indo-Pak relations cannot be compromised. In any peace process, the parties concerned must not adopt an intransigent position because any conflict which is of an intractable nature, must require a resolution through a process of give and take. Till the time, India and Pakistan stick to their established position, the question of peace process taking roots will not arise and proper conditions will not be created to change things for the better.

Plausible Peace Process?

The failure of India and Pakistan to launch a plausible peace process does not mean that no positive development can take place in relations between the two neighbours in the years to come. Plausible peace process means a situation in which the parties concerned

are able to sustain the environment of cordiality and the agreement(s) signed to settle various contentious issues are properly implemented. If we see the track record of Indo-Pak relations in last 13 years, it becomes clear that the two countries have signed numerous agreements to improve their ties but unfortunately the implementation process could not be successful in this regard.

Seven important dimensions of a plausible peace process in the perspective of India-Pakistan relations are as follows:-

1. Commitment from the two sides that they will not violate the basic norms which form the foundation of peace process.
2. Periodic steps will be taken by them to create maximum goodwill at the governmental and non-governmental level. This would also require refraining from issuing provocative statements and inciting people as a reaction to contentious issues, like Kashmir or communal tension.
3. De-escalation of tension along the borders, including withdrawal of forces from sensitive areas. Joint patrolling, sharing of information for nuclear confidence-building measures, reduction in conventional forces and cooperation in defence related matters will greatly contribute in sustaining the peace process.
4. Removal of unnecessary restrictions on the free movement of people, particularly those belonging to divided families will create basic trust, confidence and goodwill among the people of the two countries. It should be followed by greater cooperation in trade, culture, tourism, education, environment, science and technology and in other areas.
5. Sharing of information between the two countries to deal with the menace of terrorism will help dispel doubts and suspicion present in New Delhi and in Islamabad against each other.
6. Creation of institutions at the governmental and non-governmental level by India and Pakistan to monitor progress in the peace process.
7. Involvement of people at the grassroots level in the process of confidence-building, conflict management and resolution so that vested interest groups who since the partition of the Indian sub-continent have exploited religious, territorial and communal contradictions in India and Pakistan are not allowed to ruin the future of coming generations of the two countries.

Peace process is a mechanism which requires both conceptual expertise and also practical experience. Fortunately, so much work has been done in the areas of peace, peace process, confidence-building measures, conflict management and conflict

resolution that India and Pakistan can certainly make use of enormous literature and expertise which is available on such themes. But, in order to move in the direction of plausible peace process it is essential that India and Pakistan should encourage indigenous research work and methodology on the issues which since 1947 have been a cause of friction and confrontation between the two countries. In the syllabi of educational institutions of India and Pakistan, the themes of peace and conflict resolution should be included so that the younger generation of the two countries can be interested and motivated in playing a meaningful role for a better future of their people.

Rigid approach, rhetorical positions and vested interests played a negative role in the absence of plausible input by India and Pakistan for a meaningful peace process. Most important, the ruling elites of the two countries made a point not to involve themselves in the process of constructive dialogue so that they could continue to exploit the issues of national security for their own interests.

Impediments

Till the time the mindset of those at the helm of affairs remains hostage to past cleavages, narrow vision on vital issues of security and cooperation the present and future will not be different from the past and the people of India and Pakistan will continue to remain victims of short sighted policies of their governments. However, the recent developments taking place in the realm of India-Pakistan relations provide a ray of hope for a better future for the people of the two countries.

Some of the impediments which tend to discourage plausible peace process between India and Pakistan are as follows:

1. The nexus of vested interest groups including military, politicians, feudals, clergy and bureaucracy in the two countries who would ensure the maintenance of status quo in the their relations. Such a nexus managed to seek support from hard line elements in the media, particularly from the vernacular press so as to perpetuate mutual hatred and prejudices at the popular level.
2. Refusal of establishments in New Delhi and in Islamabad to adopt a flexible position on the resolution of intractable conflicts, particularly Jammu and Kashmir.
3. Using unresolved conflicts for political vested interest, as the case of using "Pakistan card" in India and "Kashmir card" in Pakistan for domestic political consumption.
4. Activities of "rogue elements" in the establishments of India and Pakistan to sabotage the positive atmosphere by exploiting unpleasant incidents.

5. Failure of the moderate elements in the civil society of India and Pakistan to prevent the resurgence of hawkish groups. The fragility of civil society in the two countries was evident after the new spell of Indo-Pak hostility following the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament on December 13, 2001.
6. The inability of the leadership in New Delhi and Islamabad to take bold and imaginative decision in order to break the stalemate and move forward for a mutually win-win situation.

Impediments mentioned above which tend to prevent India and Pakistan launch a plausible peace process could be removed through sustained process of dialogue on issues which cause friction, tension and conflict between the two neighbours. Nothing is impossible in the world of diplomacy and dialogue provided there is enough maturity, vision, will and determination among the parties concerned to take bold and imaginative decisions. But if there is reluctance, fear and insecurity among people at the helm of affairs to adopt a non-traditional approach for the resolution of intractable conflicts, not much can be done to remove impediments in peace process. In the past also, the two countries were able to build some momentum in the normalisation process but were back to square one because the policy-makers lacked the courage to deviate from the established positions.

Recent Developments and Peace Process

Although one needs to be optimistic about the future, there are certain things which are beyond one's control. Recent developments taking place in Indo-Pak relations should be analysed in the context of two separate developments. First, the relative change in the mindset of New Delhi and Islamabad about their sustained bitter relations. Second, the international situation which demands a new approach to deal with issues which threaten regional and global peace and security. Twice, India and Pakistan were on the brink of total war: in January and May 2002, but because of the hectic role played by some external players and the grim realisation of the lethal consequences of an all out war especially when there is a possibility of use of nuclear weapons led to the relative diffusion of tension between India and Pakistan.

A chain of events taking place since April 18, 2003 created hopes and expectations in unstable nature of Indo-Pak relations. These events could be categorized in two forms. First, statements and speeches made by both Indian and Pakistani leadership ups on the need to resume the normalisation process and second, actual steps taken by New Delhi and Islamabad to take their relations back to December 12, 2001. On December 12, 2001, the situation was that the two countries had normal diplomatic relations; air, train and bus links existed and tension along the border was not that bad. But, the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament on December 13, 2001, changed the dynamics of Indo-Pak relations and the two countries were in an eye ball to eye ball position for almost 17 months since then. However, even before December 13, New Delhi and Islamabad were not comfortable in bilateral dealings because of the collapse of the Agra summit in July

2001 and the terrorist events of September 11, 2001. But, what had happened on December 13 completely altered the dynamics of Indo-Pak relations with New Delhi threatening to go to war with Islamabad because of its allegations on "cross border terrorism" and Pakistan asserting to defend its sovereignty at all cost.

Now the question is how the chain of events since April 18 can help facilitate the launching of peace process between the two neighbours: India and Pakistan. Three important realities should be taken into account as far as the linkage between the chain of events and possible peace process between India and Pakistan is concerned. First, had these events not taken place, particularly the reestablishment of diplomatic links, resumption of air, bus and train services and the exchange of visits of various official and non-official delegations between the two countries proper environment for normalising relations between the two countries would not have been created. Second, on the Kashmir issue also one can see some activity starting from some reduction in cross border infiltration and the unilateral ceasefire along the Line of Control since November 26, 2003. Some behind the scene activities are also taking place to resolve the Kashmir dispute through a process of dialogue and examine various options in this regard. Third, the goodwill which has been created among the people of the two countries because of the visits of various delegations, including the one which visited Karachi under the programme organised by the Indo-Pak People's Forum for Peace and Democracy in December 2003.

All such activities tend to improve the tension ridden relations between India and Pakistan and create a better environment for the holding of SAARC summit on January 4-6, 2004. Therefore, it will not be wrong to argue that if the momentum of such events is sustained, much can be done to engage New Delhi and Islamabad in a meaningful peace process. The proposed talks between India and Pakistan scheduled to be held in February, 2004, may give a new impetus to peace process and create conditions for meaningful ties at the people to people level. It will be an uphill task but Pakistan's President Musharraf's assertion that "it is a victory of moderates of India and Pakistan", gives some assurance that hardliners will not wreck the peace process and the process of dialogue unleashed in Islamabad on the occasion of 12th SAARC summit will prevail in the days to come.