

India-Pakistan Détente

Riyaz Punjabi*

*[*Dr. Riyaz Punjabi is Professor in the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is President (Hony.), International Centre for Peace Studies, New Delhi, India.]*

Backdrop

The India—Pakistan relations have remained mired in bloody confrontations, mistrust and hostilities for the last more than five decades in their existence as Independent and sovereign countries. In fact this hostility may be traced to two nation-theory espoused by ideologues of Pakistan on which the Indian sub-Continent was divided on the eve of Independence from British in 1947. The vivisection of the sub-Continent, which had enjoyed a shared history and culture over centuries, on the basis of religion, was a painful experience for the people of the region. It not only divided people socially and politically, but equally involved the contentious issue of dividing and sharing the assets. It was the beginning of great divide, which surged in the horrible background of massacres and migration of millions of people in the sub-continent.

The first military confrontation between India and Pakistan started with the 1947-1948 war on Kashmir. This war was a sequel to the tribal incursion on Kashmir organised by Pakistan. Pakistan has been laying its claim on this Muslim majority state of Jammu and Kashmir in the Indian Union on the plea that the state was a Muslim majority area. On the other hand, India has been maintaining that the accession of Kashmir with the Union of India took place according to the provisions of Indian Independence Act of 1947, which empowered the ruler of Kashmir to accede to either Dominion, and the ruler opted for the accession with the Union of India. Moreover, for India, Kashmir could not be dealt with on religious basis in view of the secular and multi cultural character of Indian State. Be that as it may, it was the UN intervention which brought the war to an end. The cease-fire in Jammu & Kashmir between India and Pakistan brokered by the UNSC in 1948 resulted, first in the division of Kashmir into two, and later into three parts. One, Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, second, Pakistan Administered Kashmir and the third, Gilgit and Baltistan, which was truncated by Pakistan from its administered part of Kashmir and designating it as 'Northern Areas'. Out of this area, Pakistan gave certain parts to China to build Karakoram Highway. The first Bus service on this 550 KM Highway was launched on 15th June, 06 connecting Gilgit with the Chinese city of Kashgar.

The second war on Kashmir took place in 1965 which was followed by yet another war in 1971. However, the Simla Agreement, which was concluded by India and Pakistan in 1972 opened a fresh chapter in India-Pakistan relations. The ceasefire line which had come into existence through the efforts of the UN in 1948 was re-designated as Line of Actual Control (LoC). It may be mentioned here that LoC is being supervised by UN Military Observers Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP). The group investigates complaints of ceasefire violations and submits its findings to each party and to the UN Secretary-General. However, post Simla Agreement, India has not been reporting to UNMOGIP, although the mechanism stays on.

The Simla Agreement, which was hailed as a watershed in India-Pakistan relations, raised the optimism that India-Pakistan détente would be sustained. In terms of this Agreement, both countries committed themselves to resolve disputes including Kashmir, through peaceful bilateral negotiations, without third party intervention. Both countries agreed to respect the LoC and pledged not to attempt to alter it unilaterally. In the meantime, during various bilateral dialogue processes, varied proposals including a 'no-war-pact' were discussed by both the countries. However, Kashmir remained central in all these discussions. Pakistan's strategic experts maintain that Kashmir had been intertwined in the strategic doctrine of Pakistan and it remained at the center of all the other contentious issues between the two neighbouring countries.

Kashmir Militancy:

India-Pakistan détente came under severe strain with the onset of insurgency and militancy in Kashmir in 1990. India has been maintaining that this insurgency was sponsored and sustained by Pakistan. The Pakistani nationals who are killed or who have been arrested by Indian security forces substantiate this position. In fact, this insurgency followed the militancy and insurgency in the Indian state of Punjab. A detailed plan of this insurgency which was perceived by Indian defense experts and documented as 'operation topac' provide details of preparation of this insurgency by the ISI in Pakistan. It may be noted that 'operation topac' created deep mistrust in Indian strategic and political circles and it would take a long time to ward off its effects. For more than a decade and a half, coinciding with the post-cold-war era, India-Pakistan relations witnessed many ups and downs, including a small scale war in Kargil in Ladakh region of Kashmir in 1999. It was due to US intervention that this incursion did not transform into a full scale war. In 1998, both the countries had gone ahead with the nuclear blasts raising the apprehension that Kashmir had become a nuclear flash point between the two beleaguered neighbours.

It is interesting to note that during the height of militancy and turmoil in Kashmir between 1990-1999 both countries continued to hold dialogue on varied issues through their foreign secretaries. In the meanwhile, the relations appeared to be gaining momentum with the visit of Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to Lahore in February, 1999 and subsequently signing the Lahore Declaration with his Pakistani

counterpart Nawaz Sharif. They decided to resolve all bilateral disputes including Kashmir through peaceful means. However, the Lahore spirit quickly dissipated with Pakistan's incursion in Kargil in J&K bringing down the India-Pakistan détente to an all time low. It is interesting to point out that in a recent statement, former Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, now in exile in Saudi Arabia, said that he came to know about Kargil incursion through Indian Prime Minister. He has maintained that he was kept out of the Kargil military offensive by the army. Pakistan President Gen. Musharraf has rejected this observation. However, this indicates the role of Army in political and foreign affairs of Pakistan and the limitations on India-Pakistan détente. India-Pakistan relations suffered a new jolt with the terrorist attack on Indian-Parliament in 2002 by a Pakistan based Jihadi group, *Jaish-e-Mohammed*, operating in the J&K state. Consequently, India stationed its troops in an eye-ball-to-eye ball position of military confrontation on its borders for about six months.

Changing Scenario

The withdrawal of troops from the eye-ball-to-eye-ball position of confrontation, again under the covert US pressure, was followed by the pronouncement of Pakistan President Parvez Musharraf in late 2002 that he would exert to ensure the end of the phenomenon of 'cross border terrorism' and 'would not allow terrorists to use Pakistani soil as a springboard for terrorism'. It was followed by the Indian announcement of complete cease fire on LoC which was reciprocated by Pakistan as well. Thus, the concern of India that Pakistani troops indulged in indiscriminate firing to provide cover to infiltrating terrorists was met. This, however, has not resulted in the termination of violence and terrorism in J&K state.

The later developments in India-Pakistan relations which are reflected in composite dialogue process pursued by both the countries, indicate that some hazy understanding has been reached in the approach to deal with Kashmir, which according to Pakistan remains a cores issue. Instead of remaining tied down to their stated positions, both the governments appear to have embarked on creative and meaningful ways in dealing with Kashmir problem. This new and creative approach became clear with the statement of Indian Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, in Islamabad on December 20, 2004. Addressing a Press Conference after first round of India-Pakistan talks in Islamabad, he said:

"We are prepared to look at the issue that has arisen with regard to J&K by focussing on the people. Certain lines are drawn on the maps. There is nothing much we can do in the near future to change these lines. What we can do is to ameliorate the sufferings of people on both the sides. That is our effort. If we take this process of CBMs including in J&K forward to make it possible for the people to interact, perhaps options which are not available to us today may reveal themselves. Enhanced interaction among Kashmiris will throw up solutions in the times to

come. We are committed to peace process. What we are engaged in is to have peace with Pakistan.”[1](emphasis added).

In a press conference at the end of India –Pakistan talks on 28th December, 2004, Shyam Saran said that “We have agreed to promote cross-LOC contacts and promote cross international border contacts”[2].

Intra-Kashmir Connectivity

In pursuance of this approach, bus route connecting Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir with Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan Administered Kashmir was opened in April, 2005. It may be pointed out that on the occasion of the launch of the first bus service, which was flagged off by the Indian Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh and Congress President, Smt. Sonia Gandhi, a terrorist attack was launched, in which the one hundred year old historic Tourist Reception Centre in Srinagar, the venue of the launch ceremony, was reduced to ashes. However, government of India and J&K state authorities went ahead with the scheduled launch. Another bus service was launched on 21st June 2006, connecting Poonch in Jammu region with the Rawlakot in Pakistan Administered Kashmir. A truck service carrying goods is soon being launched between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad. Both the governments have agreed to open five points across the LoC to facilitate interaction between the divided families in Jammu and Kashmir. These initiatives would facilitate, apart from people to people contact, intra-state (between the two Kashmirs) trade and commerce, and gradually inter-state trade and commerce between the two countries through the routes in Kashmir. Another beginning was made with restoring the rail link between Rajasthan in India and Sindh in Pakistan with the launch of Thar express Train on 17th April, 2006. It may be pointed out here that bus link between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad was terminated in 1953 and the train link between Rajasthan and Sindh had been terminated after 1965 India –Pakistan war.

The restoration of these links have three dimensions. First, it would facilitate contacts between the divided families across LoC, and accelerate human interaction between the people across the dividing lines leading to the easing of tensions between the two countries. It is well recognised that in present times public opinion plays an important role in impacting the strategic and foreign policies of states. Second, in case of Kashmir, the greater people-to-people interaction across the LoC and increase in trade and commercial activities would create an ambiance of pre 1947 era when the Jammu and Kashmir state was a single political entity. This would enable people to readjust themselves with the existential realities. During that period, the people had free access to any part of the state and they would trade within and beyond the boundaries of state without any restrictions. The new India – Pakistan initiatives, without impinging on sovereign rights of both the countries, would ultimately make the borders irrelevant. That borders should be reduced to irrelevance has been a constant refrain of Indian political leadership transcending ideological and political boundaries. Third, easing of

tensions between the two countries would augment their trade and commerce enabling them to achieve the objectives of greater economic and social development. They would jointly meet the challenges of globalisation and ensure that processes of globalisation are tuned and adjusted to the advantages of South Asian region.

Economic Co-operation

India and Pakistan have a chequered history of trade and economic cooperation. India-Pakistan trade relations continued for some time even after partition of the sub-continent. Thus, during the years 1948-49 Pakistan's exports to India stood at 56% and imports from India were 36%[3]. However, from 1950 onwards trade between the two countries was almost negligible. After second India-Pakistan war of 1965 even the negligible trade activities came to a complete halt until 1974. It is ironical, as noted by Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce (FICCI), that estimated value of illegal trade between India and Pakistan was to the tune of more than \$ 2 billion[4]. A study of India-Pakistan détente reveals that there is a close co-relation between economic cooperation and détente between the two countries. An improvement in India-Pakistan relations correspondingly leads to increase in trade and commerce between the two countries. It may be mentioned here that India-Pakistan trade has three components. One is the circular or 'informal' trade which is carried out through third countries and then re-exported to either country. Second is the formal trade carried out through recognised mechanisms and routes. Third, and the largest, is the 'black' or illegal trade carried out through the land borders. The circular trade is estimated to be to the tune of US \$ 1 billion[5]. In case the trade is conducted through official channels, both the countries are going to increase the revenue receipts, apart from saving the expenses incurred on circular trade. There has been some improvement since 1990 in trade relations between the two countries. However, it still remains below the expected levels. In absence of an elaborate India-Pakistan trade agreement, no substantial improvement has taken place. In 1996, both the countries agreed to trade in 615 items, but in actual terms 90% trade took place in 42 items only. The SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Areas Agreement) became operational from July 1, 2006. It was expected to widen the arena of trade between the two countries. However, Pakistan has refused to implement the agreement with India. According to media reports Pakistan continues to conduct trade with India on the basis of 2005-06 trade policy which allows 773 items for import from India from the 'positive list' drawn by Pakistan. The India has termed this policy to be against the spirit of SAFTA. With the SAFTA becoming operational, Pakistan notified 4872 items to be traded on reduced tariffs.[6]

It is interesting to note that India-Pakistan détente works in curious ways. For instance, both the countries come to the rescue of each other during the times of crisis. They undertake, which may be called, '*trade during crisis*'. In the year 1990, India helped Pakistan tide over an onion and potato crisis, and again Pakistan imported 50,000 tons of sugar from India on an emergency basis in 1997. India also depends on Pakistan for sugar, potatoes, onions and chillies during the periods of

shortage. It is again interesting to note that largest ever trade between the two countries, to the tune of US \$ 320 million was during the fiscal year 1998-99. It was the fiscal year in which nuclear tests were undertaken by both the countries (May, 1998) followed by Kargil war (May-June 1999). It may be mentioned here that fiscal year in Pakistan runs from July to June[7]. There was improvement in trade relations in 2000-01 when imports from India rose to US \$ 235 million and US \$ 187 million in 2001-2002. According to available official figures, Pakistan's imports from India are higher than those from France, Canada, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Turkey, Iran and Thailand.[8]

Energy Requirements

The rate of economic growth in India and Pakistan is on an upward swing. During the recent months, growth rate in India has been above 8% and in Pakistan it has gone above 5%. Both the countries need affordable energy to sustain and enlarge their economic growth. Since neither country is self-sufficient in meeting their energy requirements, they have to rely heavily on energy imports. Pakistan imports more than half of its oil and India imports nearly two-thirds of oil from outside. Natural gas has emerged as the energy source of choice for the 21st century. It is easy to transport and less polluting than coal and oil. The natural gas is available in abundant quantity in the neighboring countries and can be transported to India through Pakistan. The natural gas pipeline from Iran through Pakistan to India was designated as an ideal project in which Pakistan would earn \$600 million in transit fees and India would save \$ 2 billion a year by importing this gas from Iran. However, the discussions for this four billion dollar project is making no headway. India-Pakistan tensions and apprehensions as well as international politics, both are coming in the way of this project.

The transport linkages among South Asian countries and beyond is the key factor for the economic development and peaceful relations among these countries. These linkages need to be established as well as upgraded. That road and air links between India and Pakistan are so crucial may be gauged from the fact that during the crisis between India and Pakistan in 2002 when both the countries prohibited flights over their respective spaces, the flight time between Delhi to Islamabad and vice versa increased from 45 minutes to 26 hours. In order to reach to Delhi from Islamabad and vice versa one had to travel to Dubai and cover more than 3,000 miles. Apart from time, it involved expenses as well.[9]

The Role of SAARC:

The South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation(SAARC), comprising seven countries of South Asian region constituted by Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, was formed in 1985 as a regional cooperative organisation to promote common economic, social and cultural development. However, in actual terms, SAARC has not delivered much and main reason attributed

to its lack of performance is the disagreements between India and Pakistan. These differences were responsible for postponement of SAFTA, first in 2001 and later in 2002. The 12th Summit of heads of state, which was supposed to be a yearly event, had to be delayed for 12 months because of India's refusal to participate in the summit in view of Pakistan's role in Kashmir militancy. There has not been unanimity on the agenda and venue of the meetings of SAARC on many occasions. Thus, the performance of SAARC is intertwined with the India-Pakistan détente. Be that as it is, SAARC has provided a forum for India and Pakistan for interactions and exchanges. During the periods of crisis, and in absence of formal channels of interaction, Indian and Pakistani leaders and officials have interacted on the sidelines of SAARC meetings. It has helped in breaking ice-during crucial times. It may be pointed out that India-Pakistan détente aside, SAARC countries are also tied to bilateral agreements and strategic partner-ships outside the region. Moreover, the dynamics of extra regional politics is laying its impact on the functioning of SAARC. Historically, Pakistan's association with CETO and CENTO had the consequences on her relationship with India. Thus, SAARC has to devise mechanisms to adopt strategies to synergise its performance as a regional cooperative organisation in realising its objectives with the changing dynamics of international relations and politics. It has to accord proper priorities to its objectives.

Arms Race

At one level, India and Pakistan are moving ahead to strengthen their bilateral cooperation through the composite dialogue process and Confidence Building Measures. At another level, certain developments are taking place which have the potential to render the processes of reconciliation fragile. The race to acquire military and nuclear parity is cited as one of the major threats to India-Pakistan détente. Since 1999 nuclear blasts, the military spending of India and Pakistan has almost doubled. The increase in India's defense services budget by 7.8% in March, 2005 evoked sharp responses from Pakistan. This was followed by the US offer to Pakistan to sell F-16 Warplanes. In order to deal India differentially, the US offered to India to sell F-18 multi-role warplanes which the US has not sold even to its NATO allies. This offer is tied up with the lifting of a three decade-long embargo on cooperation in civil nuclear technology with India. These developments have been described by experts as '*a runaway South Asian arms race*'[10]. Thus, in August 2005, Pakistan tested its first indigenously built cruise missile, Babar Cruise Missile. According to Pakistani strategic analysts, it is terrain-hugging missile and can reach an enemy target without being detected by radar with a range of 500 kilometers. The Babar Cruise missile is developed for land and submarine launched applications, with a long-term goal of making it suitable for airborne launch, and the intention is to have it deployed on Pakistan's French-designed Agosta 90-class attack submarines. The Pakistani analysts comment that 'Pakistan vows to modernise its offensive and defensive capability keeping in view the Indian-US military partnership.'[11] According to PTI, quoting Pakistan Observer, Pakistan has placed order with the US for acquisition of 130 latest

version Harpoon Missiles at a price of \$370 million. The missiles, belonging to the latest Block II version, would form part of 1.5 billion US military aid to Pakistan. The Harpoon Block II version is an upgraded program designed to improve the missile's ability to attack targets in congested littoral environments where nearly land masses or ships can provide cover for targets[12]. In the meanwhile, Pakistan President, Gen. Parvez Musharraf has urged upon the US to deal with Pakistan on equal footing with India. In an interview with China Central News Agency on 19th June, 2006, General Musharraf said that 'US-India nuclear agreement was a bilateral matter between the two countries. However, in order to maintain the military balance in the region, Pakistan should not be treated differently than India. Pakistan did not approve of this approach'.[13]

Conclusion

India-Pakistan détente has great strategic, economic, social and cultural implications not only for South Asian countries but for the countries in South East and Central Asia as well. It has equally economic and social implications for Afghanistan and Iran. Presently, India—Pakistan détente appears to be moving on two tracks.

On one track, Pakistan is competing with India in acquiring military parity in terms of arms, ammunition and preparedness. This has led to enhancing of the military budgets and purchase of arms at the cost of urgent and special social welfare requirements in both the countries. It is clear that this arms race is placing military security above human security in both the countries. In view of the fact that both the countries have acquired the wherewithal of nuclear deterrence, the resort to purchase of conventional arms is an enigma. It reminds us of 18th century Europe when getting weary of wars and conflicts, the European countries decided to end wars and concentrated on economic cooperation and development. The economic prosperity in European countries was followed by their large scale arms purchases until the futility of this arms race dawned upon them and they embarked on the path of what today is the 'European Union'. This is the optimistic view one can take in the backdrop of 'runaway arms race' in South Asia involving India and Pakistan.

Kashmir remains a core issue for Pakistan. Pakistan President, Gen. Parvez Musharraf, addressing the second Summit of the conference on Interaction and confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in Almaty (Russia) on 17th June, 2006 said that the implementation of a number of CBM's in diverse sectors has improved relations and security environment in South Asia. This offers a unique opportunity that must be seized to resolve the Kashmir dispute and usher in a new era of peace and cooperation in South Asia. India, in the same Summit, stressed the urgency to tackle terrorism on priority basis [14]. Terrorism remains a grave concern for India and it has special implications for India —Pakistan détente.

On the second track, dialogue has been continuing on various contentious issues between the two countries. Kashmir has been very much included in the composite dialogue process. Realising that there can be no cartographic solution to the problem, new approaches have been adopted to deal with it. Moreover, Pakistan has to face the problems in its administered part of Kashmir as well. It is facing the ire of pro-Independence, Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) political activists whose nomination forms to participate in assembly elections which were held in July, 2006, on the ground that they refused to file affidavits to support Kashmir's accession to Pakistan. Thus, in view of the complex nature of the problem, it is advisable to concentrate on processes rather than on the solutions.

The easing of travel facilities to enable the interactions between the people across the divide aside, the differences on Indus Water resources, a perpetual concern for Pakistan, is being addressed. Both the countries, restarted negotiations on Tulbul Navigation Project (Wuller barrage for Pakistan) for two days in Islamabad from 20th June. This matter has been lingering on for about two decades now and Government of India has almost abandoned the project after spending 40% of the estimated budget of the project. Another hydro-electricity power project, Baglihar, is facing objections from Pakistan. Pakistan has taken the issue to Indus Water Treaty Commissioners. It is interesting to note that Indus Water Treaty which was concluded in 1960 gave Pakistan almost exclusive rights over three rivers of Chenab, Jhelum and Sutlej, flowing through Kashmir. Although the treaty allows run-of-the-river projects over these waters to India, Pakistan has been suspicious over any such project by India. It is a fact that this treaty has survived wars and confrontations between the two countries. Moreover, India has never used water as a strategic weapon against Pakistan. Last year, India proposed to Pakistan the joint management of such projects which are underway in Kashmir. The construction of such projects jointly and sharing the profits seems to be a sensible approach. It is also being proposed to harness other sectors like tourism, horticulture and handicrafts which could be developed jointly by both the countries and allow the people in J&K on both the sides to reap the benefits of such joint ventures. These measures would go a long way in strengthening détente between India and Pakistan. India and Pakistan have to move away from the mode of suspicion and hostility to a mode of confidence and cooperation. Recently, India and Pakistan have decided to file a joint application for geographical indication (GI) Registration in the US and Europe for Basmati rice which is grown both in India and Pakistan.[15]

That India-Pakistan détente will not only hold but would gain strength is indicated in a recent address by Pakistan Prime Minister, Shaukat Aziz, at a South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) organised conference of TV journalists from South Asia in Karachi on June 18, 06. He said that cooperation between Pakistan and India on construction of energy corridors from Iran and Turkmenistan would create the kind of 'interdependence' the two neighbours required for ensuring peace or moving forward on complex political issues. He said that "we must pursue objectives that are in our

national interest". He focused as much on building economic ties as on the need for a 'paradigm shift' on Kashmir.[16]

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