
Asia

Indo-Pakistani relations at a crossroad, after Afghan accord

by Susan Maitra

Two rounds of talks between high-level Indian and Pakistani government officials were concluded May 20, and it has been announced that Pakistan's foreign secretary will visit India from May 31-June 1 to discuss "outstanding issues." This series of exchanges, coming after the tense relationship between the two neighbors heated to the boiling point during April, broke a nearly two-year-long diplomatic standoff.

The reason? The shifting dynamics of the post-Afghanistan Accord situation are compelling both sides to attempt to surmount the deep disagreements that have thrice led to shooting war—disagreements that are mostly the bitter fruit of the subcontinent's partition in 1947. The now-threatened partition of Afghanistan and the continuing presence of the "loose cannons" of the Afghan mujahiddin in Pakistan, pose a threat to Pakistan's integrity which is already being felt in India.

It is apparent that New Delhi has in some sense appreciated the dangers. And, even at the height of the April anti-Pakistan invective in Delhi, Pakistan's Ambassador Humayun Khan emphasized his government's "continued confidence" that the statesmanship and vision of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi would ultimately win the day.

Necessity may be the most powerful inspiration. Despite the obstacles and legacy of mistrust, only joint action by India and Pakistan can stem the terrorism and separatist upsurge on the subcontinent and prevent its disastrous consequences.

Taking up where they left off

Efforts by the new Rajiv Gandhi administration in 1985 to put the Indo-Pakistani relationship onto a constructive track were buried in early 1986 under domestic political pressure, and it is the agenda for dialogue set at that time which was resumed May 14-16 when Indian Home Secretary C.G. Somiah and Pakistani Interior Secretary Sayed Khalid Mahmoud met in New Delhi to discuss the problem of cross-border traffic in terrorists, weapons, and drugs.

By all accounts, the talks were frank and produced some results. These include plans, proposed by Pakistan, for joint patrol of the sensitive border area along the Indian states of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. The joint communiqué recorded both nations' agreement to take measures to contain

terrorism, drug trafficking, smuggling, and illegal border crossings. Both sides agreed to extend mutual assistance in criminal cases related to drug trafficking and smuggling, and it was agreed that the Home Secretaries would confer and formally meet again within six months.

Significantly, the Pakistani delegation accepted India's charge that sophisticated arms were being smuggled across the border from Pakistan into the hands of Sikh terrorists in Punjab. But Islamabad denied any government agency was involved in the subversive traffic. This issue and the charge from the Indian government that Pakistan was "aiding and abetting" the Sikh separatist campaign in Punjab, had surcharged the atmosphere in New Delhi during April, as the Punjab turmoil came to a new frenzy.

The Pakistani delegation also positively responded to India's proposal that, as proof of Pakistan's good intention, action be taken on two key issues: arrest and extradition of some top Sikh extremists living in Pakistan who are wanted by Indian authorities, and trial of the Sikh terrorists who hijacked an Indian Airlines jet to Pakistan in 1986.

A common threat

In the recent months, a qualitative acceleration of terrorism in Punjab has taken more than 800 civilian lives. With the surfacing of ultra-sophisticated, Soviet-made RPG-7 rockets and the so-far-unconfirmed rumors that the terrorists were also now in possession of American Stinger missiles, all eyes in Delhi had been trained on Pakistan. The Afghan mujahiddin in Pakistan have been the center of a flourishing arms trade.

But if India brought a bill of particulars to the meeting—including Pakistani hosting of foreign-based Sikh separatists and training of terrorists—Pakistani officials have their own complaints and worries. According to Mr. Somiah, Mr. Mahmoud made a passing reference to India's alleged involvement in the Karachi riots and the trouble in the Pakistani province of Sind. Though there is no evidence known to this writer of Indian meddling, the anti-Pakistan lobby in Delhi has been giving top billing to the renewed movement for Sind liberation in particular.

The trouble started as Afghan refugees, armed with mon-

ey and guns, moved south to the port city and Sind capital Karachi, over the past several years. The Afghan occupation of Karachi upset ethnic-political dynamics in the city and province, boosting separatist activity in the process. Violence and rioting have repeatedly swept Karachi for more than a year now, as Afghans fought the traditionally pro-government Mohajirs—Indian Muslims who opted for Pakistan at partition—for control of the area. The alienated and demoralized Mohajirs are now being courted by the reawakened Sind separatist movement, Jiye Sind, which advocates the breakup of Pakistan and has long been celebrated by Indian leftists.

Military matters

On May 20, in Islamabad, Indian Defense Secretary S.K. Bhatnagar and Pakistani Defense Secretary Ijlal Haider Zaidi concluded two days of talks, the third round in several years, on border issues that stem from Pakistan's occupation of a portion of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947. At issue is the strategic, and as yet undemarcated Siachen Glacier, where since 1984 Indo-Pakistani eyeballing has several times erupted into open skirmishing.

The defense officials agreed to examine proposals for settling Siachen at their next meeting, and official Indian sources acknowledged that Pakistan had displayed a "realistic approach." A joint press release records both sides' determination to work for a negotiated and peaceful solution to the Siachen issue in accordance with the 1972 Shimla Agreement. The Indian Defense Secretary, and Indian Ambassador S.K. Singh, also called on General Zia, Prime Minister Jenejo and Minister of State for Defense Rana Naeem Mahmood.

The Shimla pact, signed by Indira Gandhi and former Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto a year after Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) had broken with Islamabad and with Indian assistance established its independence, states that all outstanding issues between the two nations will be settled between themselves by negotiation. This treaty, and the Indus Water Treaty of 1956, which resolved the division of waters of the Indus River system, remain the high points of the Indo-Pakistani relationship.

Beyond Shimla?

The most crucial development, however, was the announcement May 20 that Pakistani Foreign Secretary Abdul Sattar, a former ambassador to India, would be visiting India at the end of May.

Several items are already on the agenda for these talks—in particular a bilateral treaty to put Indo-Pakistani relations on a new, more stable and dynamic footing. A Pakistani draft "non-aggression pact" and an Indian draft "peace and friendship treaty" are already on the table, and the effort will be to reconcile them. The main stumbling block has been Pakistan's unwillingness to surrender its sovereign defense op-

tions by agreeing that it would never grant military facilities or base rights to a third party.

There is, in addition, an accord on non-attack on each others' nuclear facilities, agreed in principle between Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq and Rajiv Gandhi in 1985, which reportedly requires only the dotting of the i's and crossing of t's. Finally, there are proposals for increasing trade between the two countries.

Mr. Sattar will likely be bringing a high-level political message. His visit follows the one-day visit of Indian Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon to Islamabad May 4, as Rajiv Gandhi's emissary to compare notes with Pakistani officials prior to the Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and the scheduled visit of Afghan Prime Minister Najibullah to New Delhi.

Credibility gaps, old and new

India's hectic activity around Afghanistan since it became clear that an accord would be signed—including efforts to get a joint approach to the post-accord situation with Pakistan—is, at least in part, the most dramatic testimony to Delhi's perception of the dangers at hand. Although India had sought a joint Indo-Pakistani response to the Afghanistan crisis as early as 1980—when the late Indira Gandhi sent her emissary Swaran Singh to Islamabad—New Delhi's subsequent stony silence for eight long years has fueled anew the cynicism in Pakistani political circles about India's bona fides.

It is these circles which are now most resistant to Indo-Pakistani rapprochement. The fragmentation of power in Pakistan between stunted political process, a powerful bureaucracy, and a strong military which remains the controlling factor, compounds the problem. India is undeniably a big target for the little war-games of revenge-seekers among a military elite that is subject to no political controls. In the broader domestic political arena, the "India issue" is the most convenient political football in the constant jockeying for position.

To date, superpower manipulations in the region have done more, perhaps, than anything else to keep India and Pakistan at each other's throats. In India, the Pakistan bogey has been a favorite issue of opportunity for the left, in unholy alliance with Hindu fundamentalists. Especially in its U.S.-Pakistan alliance incarnation, this bogey has given powerful rationale to India's strategic relationship to the Soviet Union. The past years' revelations about Pakistan alleged bomb-making, like the most recent flap over alleged Pakistani testing of a new missile, keep the issue alive.

But here, the fact that Pakistan has legitimate defense requirements, or that, as a small nation, she might be expected to be concerned about India's strength, is hopelessly obscured by the historical fact that it was not India, but Pakistan that opened fire on each of the three occasions the two neighbors fought.