

Summit meeting sets the stage for breakthrough in India-Pakistan ties

by Susan Maitra

A succession of creative initiatives from India over the past months has struck a responsive chord in Pakistan, and there is new anticipation—and in some quarters, anxiety—that the obsessive and embittered relations that have produced three wars between the two countries since the wrenching experience of partition may be on the way to being transformed.

That a qualitative change was in the offing became apparent in December, when Pakistani President Gen. Zia ul-Haq paid a half-day visit to New Delhi for consultation with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, their sixth meeting in about 14 months. At a press conference following the Dec. 17 summit, the two leaders announced the conclusion of an agreement not to attack each other's nuclear installations, an agreement initiated by Prime Minister Gandhi. That was big news in itself, in light of new upsets caused by evidence that Pakistan's nuclear energy program has a weapons component.

In addition, Prime Minister Gandhi and President Zia set forth an agenda of contact and consultation even up to a state visit by Rajiv Gandhi to Pakistan before June—the first time an India prime minister has set foot on Pakistani soil since Jawaharlal Nehru went to Islamabad in 1957 to sign the historic Indus River watershed agreement, that had taken years of painstaking negotiations.

One day before President Zia and Prime Minister Gandhi met in New Delhi, a delegation of Pakistani scientists led by the chairman of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission, Dr. Munir Ahmad Khan, had attended the inauguration of India's fast-breeder test reactor by Prime Minister Gandhi at Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu. Rajiv Gandhi had invited President Zia himself to join him at the inauguration, an offer accepted by the Pakistani leader when the two met in Oman in November. Later, public outcry in Pakistan that the event fell on the anniversary of the Pakistani Army's surrender of Dhaka to the Indian Army in the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, forced General Zia to reschedule his visit.

By all accounts—including the affirmation of General Zia himself, who in a candid television interview in Sri Lanka prior to visiting Delhi, stated that there was undoubted political will in the leadership of both India and Pakistan to improve relations—the new momentum in Indo-Pakistani re-

lations is the result of mutual efforts and initiatives.

At this writing, the third high-level Indian delegation in as many weeks of the new year is winding up meetings and discussions in Islamabad, where significant progress has been made in broad areas of economic cooperation and political relations, as well as on specific prickly points. In February, all four of the sub-commissions of the Indo-Pakistani Joint Commission, under the leadership of the foreign secretaries, will be meeting in Islamabad.

Indian Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari, who left Delhi on Jan. 16 at the head of a five-man team, told a press conference in Islamabad on Jan. 20 that each of the seven or eight rounds of talks with his counterpart Nia Naik, had marked a step forward in putting Indo-Pakistani relations on a solid and sound basis. The aim, he said, was to make Prime Minister Gandhi's spring visit a "historic event."

Bhandari and Naik released a joint statement summarizing their discussions. Besides setting out solutions for a number of minor irritants between the two countries, and outlining plans for increased contact, the foreign secretaries finalized a common draft legally binding the two countries not to attack each other's nuclear facilities, as has been agreed to by President Zia and Prime Minister Gandhi.

On the central task of preparing a common draft of a comprehensive bilateral treaty, one that would merge the "no war pact" proposed by Pakistan and the "friendship treaty" offered by Delhi, some progress was made. Pakistan submitted a revised draft of the two points that has constituted the main stumbling block—namely, India's insistence that outstanding issues between the two countries be handled on a strictly bilateral basis (a reference to the hoary Kashmir issue), and that neither country provide military bases to a third country (reflecting India's concern over Pakistan's relations with the United States).

Significantly, while the Bhandari mission was still in Pakistan, the long-awaited verdict was delivered in the cases of 14 Sikh militants, members of the separatist Dal Khalsa and All-India Sikh Student Federation involved in hijacking two Air India planes to Lahore in 1981 and 1984. Special Judge Fazal Karim announced in Lahore on Jan. 20 that 10

of the 14 had been convicted, and that the leader of the hijacking and two accomplices were given death sentences, and 7 others life imprisonment.

Failure to prosecute this case has been one of the sore points between the two countries, highlighting India's concern that Pakistan had an interested hand in the destabilization of Punjab. India had at first demanded extradition of the terrorists for trial in India, but Pakistan refused and, finally, in 1984, constituted a special court under the Anti-Terrorist Act to try the case in Pakistan. There were many delays in the process—it took another year, until March 1985, to start the trial—fueling Indian suspicion.

Now, responding to a direct question regarding the Pakistani attitude toward the Sikh terrorists, Bhandari said there had been a frank exchange of views and that there was "an understanding."

Economic cooperation

On Pakistan's suggestion, the January meeting of Congress ministers scheduled to follow up the Rajiv-Zia summit was raised to the level of finance ministers. Consequently, on Jan. 8-9, Indian Finance Minister Z. P. Singh and his counterpart, Dr. Mahbub Ul-Haq, the former World Bank official who visited India in November and has reportedly played a key role in the normalization process, held talks in Islamabad. The result was the reopening of private-sector trade between the two countries, which was frozen eight years ago. According to the Indian finance minister on return to Delhi, Pakistan has responded favorably to the idea of a long-term trade agreement with India, which he said could materialize during Prime Minister Gandhi's visit to Pakistan.

In 1978 General Zia banned private trade and squeezed economic relations under the public sector channel down to the present minuscule level of \$50 million annually. Discussions now envision the expansion of private trade from the present 42 items to 200-300—to be finalized by a special committee with Pakistan within the next month—and a doubling of public-sector commerce during the current year. The mutual benefit is obvious: Pakistan needs iron ore, wheat and pesticides, which India has in abundance, and India needs fertilizer, which Pakistan can supply.

The two finance ministers also agreed to promote joint ventures between the two business communities, whose leaders will set up a committee to work out the details.

At the same time, talks were underway on some testy defense matters. On Jan. 10 a second Indian delegation had left for Pakistan, this one led by Defense Secretary S. K. Bhatnagar, for two rounds of talks on the Siachen border issue with their Pakistani counterparts and a meeting with Prime Minister Junejo. The snowbound mountainous area called Siachen has been the scene of skirmishing and some deaths over the last two years, and was discussed by President Zia and Prime Minister Gandhi on two occasions, before they agreed to refer the matter to the defense secretary level.

Since V. P. Singh's mission was the first of the new year's activity, it is not surprising that upon his return to Delhi, the finance minister was greeted with a roaring "controversy"—had he or had he not actually signed a memorandum of understanding? Behind the surfacing of such a non-issue, lies what is fast becoming Delhi's political equivalent of the flat earth society—the anti-Pakistani lobby. They have found their most sophisticated spokesmen, not surprisingly, among the pro-Moscow lobby in the capital. So far this lobby has been hesitant to attack the prime minister directly—his stated priority to improve relations with the neighbors is so patently in the country's national interest.

But by mid-January, the gloves were off, as left-intellectual press outlets began linking strident attacks on the "Foreign Office bosses" with an ultimatum to Rajiv himself: "It is for Prime Minister Gandhi to realize," one of these guardians of the faith intoned, "that there are serious misgivings in the country at the current moves for settlement with the military junta in Pakistan—moves which are known to be integrally linked to a concept of strategic overlordship over South Asia."

Pakistan also has its "guardian of the faith"—and it is no great surprise either to find the newly revised Muslim League hastily passing a resolution cautioning against normalization of relations with India, because such a process ignores "historical facts."

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