

Pakistan Extends Olive Branch to India

by Ramtanu Maitra

Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, in his address to the nation on Nov. 23, on completion of the first year of his government, announced a unilateral cease-fire along the Line of Control (LoC) that divides the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) between India and Pakistan, beginning with the holy Muslim day of Eid (Nov. 26). India has accepted the proposal, while urging Pakistan to stop cross-border infiltration. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesman said that the cease-fire agreement took place during the weekly telephone conversation between the Directors-General of Military Operations of India and Pakistan.

Prime Minister Jamali also expressed his willingness to start bus service between Srinagar, the Summer capital of the Indian-part of J&K—and Muzaffarabad, the capital of the Pakistani-part of J&K; to start ferry service from the Pakistani port of Karachi to the Indian port of Mumbai (formerly called Bombay); to revive air links between the two countries; and to open the Khokhrapar (in Pakistan's province of Sindh)-Munabao (in the Indian state of Gujarat) railroad route, which was closed following the 1965 India-Pakistan War. All these proposals, except the cease-fire, were among the 12 peace proposals offered to Pakistan by the Indian External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha on Oct. 22.

'Confidence-Building Measures'

To attempt to forecast any major outcome from this give and take between New Delhi and Islamabad would be frustrating. There is nothing in the statement of either side which indicates that these measures—one may call them Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)—would lead to the resolution of the five-decades-old J&K dispute. In fact, the resolution of such an old and historic conflict cannot be brought about through CBMs, but only through political processes. While in India, the political leaders have, in essence, succeeded in preparing the citizenry to accept the LoC as the international boundary, no such effort has been made in Pakistan. For 1 billion people of India, and particularly those who live in the eastern and southern part of India, Kashmir is a minor issue. But in Pakistan, J&K is the bread and butter of the military which has run the country for most of its existence. No political leader could open his or her mouth while in power on matters concerning Jammu and Kashmir or, for that matter, Afghanistan, without taking that into account.

On the other hand, the cease-fire, if observed meticulously

FIGURE 1

The Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir



by both sides, would lead to an environment in which talks can be held to resolve other disputes and open new economic and infrastructure-building cooperation. Success in those areas would ensure greater security and better understanding between the two nations.

What Triggered the Offer?

There are interesting developments in the region that led to Prime Minister Jamali's offer. As long as the world was divided into "us" and "them" during the Cold War days, and Pakistan was part of "us" (a U.S. ally) while India was part of "them," Pakistan was not doing too badly—either politically or financially. But, with the end of the Cold War, those days were gone. Pakistan is now under attack from umpteen nations for harboring terrorists and spreading a dangerous form of religious fundamentalism. At the same time, Pakistan is getting poorer, with a large foreign debt and more illiterate people; there are many in Pakistan who openly admit that the rot has set in firmly.

India, on the other hand, has gotten out of its lethargy. With large and capable manpower reserves, India is now economically a power to reckon with in Asia. Militarily, it has moved way ahead of Pakistan. Almost all Western nations, and others elsewhere, are eager to sell military hardware to New Delhi, while a few others are in the process of joint research and development ventures with India to manufacture high-technology military hardware for sale to a third party.

It was reported on Nov. 24 that India and the United States are set to sign a breakthrough agreement on sharing classified military research data. The Master Information Exchange Agreement would mark the beginning of a new phase that would be far-reaching in bilateral defense relations, officials involved in negotiations said.

India's Growing Strength

India has widened its economic ties beyond the West and its immediate neighborhood. Its economic ties with Sri Lanka and Thailand, meanwhile, are growing. The Indo-Sri Lanka free-trade area has given a fillip to mutual trade. The more recent Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), spanning trade, services, and Foreign Direct Investment, will carry this forward further. A land-bridge has been proposed across the 21-kilometer-wide Palk Straits, which separates the Indian subcontinent from Sri Lanka. This could also carry transmission lines to hook up Sri Lanka to India's Southern Region Electricity Grid, with the Koodankulam nuclear power plant cluster serving as a base load station, Indian energy expert B.G. Verghese pointed out in an article in *The Hindu* on Nov. 25.

India already has an agreement with Thailand and Myanmar to build a Dawei (Tavoy)-Kanchanburi road link for inter-modal transit inland from Indian ports. There is now a new Indo-Thai agreement to link the Andaman Sea and Gulf of Thailand with an oil/gas pipeline, and to link Port Blair of the Nicobar Islands with Phuket in Thailand in a tourist circuit. Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has told the leaders of Vietnam recently that he would be working toward connecting New Delhi to Hanoi by railroads. These could mark the beginning of the ASEAN+3 (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, plus China, Japan, and South Korea) plus one (India) vision of a larger Asian community.

All these developments underline the strategic importance of India's island territories, particularly the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which command the Malacca Straits and the sea-lanes that carry vast quantities of Persian Gulf oil to Pacific destinations. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands place India in close proximity to ASEAN.

But India has gone beyond its "Look East" policy. It has added a "Look North" element by concluding the India-China agreement on Sikkim-Tibet trade, and by establishing a North-South Corridor from Bandar Abbas in Iran to Russia. Now, both External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha and Prime Minister Vajpayee have promised to link up the North-South Corridor with Afghanistan through Iran, and with Tajikistan through Afghanistan.

For years, the military leaders of Pakistan, with the help of many Western cold warriors, had convinced themselves and their population that India is a disintegrating nation. By bleeding India in the state of Jammu and Kashmir through encouraging insurgency, the disintegration of India would be assured and Pakistan would not have to live with a large and

unstable adversary along its eastern borders. The post-Cold War initiatives by India perhaps did not create sufficient conditions for the Pakistani military leaders to take a second look at their India policy. What perhaps did the trick are the growing India-China relations.

The China Factor

Pakistan, a very close ally of China, used to indulge itself with the illusion, like many Western and Eastern geopoliticians, that India and China would remain mortal enemies. Pakistani military leaders believed that as long as they could maintain close, friendly relations with Beijing, India would remain constrained. Their main belief was based on what they thought to be a non-resolvable China-India border dispute—a legacy of the British Raj—which was further festered by the 1962 India-China border clash.

But that, too, has changed. Following the Indian Prime Minister's historic visit to China last June, both New Delhi and Beijing have put much importance on resolving the border dispute. The two sides appointed Special Representatives—National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra on the Indian side, and Senior Vice-Minister Dai Bingguo on the Chinese—with the mandate to negotiate the framework of a boundary settlement from a political perspective. They met last October, and if there is any need for more evidence that both are ready to resolve the border issues, one has only to listen to what Indian External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha said at a public gathering in New Delhi on Nov. 22.

Yashwant said that New Delhi and Beijing must attempt to resolve all outstanding bilateral disputes "without postponing the tough decisions for the next generation." In addition, in his address to the combined conference of the Indian military commanders on Nov. 1, Prime Minister Vajpayee said that resolution of the boundary problem with China would release India's "military and financial resources" and was therefore a "strategic objective." And in achieving this objective, Vajpayee suggested that India must be prepared to take pragmatic decisions—a euphemism for big concessions on territorial claims of the past.

It has become evident to the Pakistani military leaders that India is no longer an inward-looking nation fearful of disintegration, but is confidently ready to deal with China on the thorniest issues and, at the same time, getting ready to make concessions to settle the vexatious border dispute.

These developments, and the bleak future that stares Islamabad in its face, perhaps were the reason for the new olive branch that Prime Minister Jamali has held up.

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