

## PARADIGMS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SOUTH ASIA

## Reconstructing confidence amidst mistrust

As war mongering picks up speed, a two-day workshop at Karachi University calls for peace in the region

By Zulfiqar Shah

On the day when the Indian government recalled its High Commissioner from Islamabad and announced the suspension of railway and bus communication with Pakistan in the wake of December 13th attack on the Indian Parliament, peace scholars from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India sat with their Pakistani friends in Karachi University to discuss the prospects of peace. This was kicked off a two-day international conference on "Paradigms of Conflict Resolution in South Asia" by the Department of International Relations, KI.

Such a timely exercise shows that there are people who firmly believe in the peace process, and who are committed to reduce the tension between the two countries. Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) is an ideal concept, which gives a sense of hope to those who remain under the shadow of an endless sense of insecurity and fear.

After the September 11th attacks on America, the world has changed a lot. The future of South Asia, the underdeveloped region of one billion humans, is a big challenge as there are lots of inter- and intra-state conflicts," said Prof Mooinis Akhtar, head of the Programme on Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, KI, while explaining the objectives of workshop. "The workshop is an opportunity to share perceptions and ideas on the theme of conflict resolution and how a consensus on traditional and non traditional paradigms of security and peace process and confidence building could be created in the backdrop of developments taking place after the terrorist attacks on America. We know we can not resolve the conflict, but at least we can minimise it."

Through the speakers discussed the topic in the context of the entire South Asian region in their written papers, their live speeches, discussions and queries focused on Pak-Indian relations.

Most of the speakers didn't hesitate in predicting the possibility of a nuclear war between the two neighbouring countries. The debate was also extended to America's so-called War Against Terrorism. "We are standing on extreme points. Through there has been a series of bilateral talks, but nothing changed and there is a possibility of nuclear war," warned Prof Faouze Hase-



mat, chairman of the department of political science, University of Punjab, Lahore. "There is only one way to save the region and that is both the countries requesting the US for mediation," he suggested adding that when both the parties are stuck then it is better to go back to success stories. In his view, Pak-India negotiations have always been successful with third party mediation. He put forward the examples of Simla Agreement of 1971 and the Tashkent Agreement of 1966.

Prof Hasan's views drew a quick response from Indian delegate Sandeep Wesskar, an on-fort trained expert in conflict resolution, who disagreed with the idea of mediation and went on to say that third party intervention had always added to the problem, rather than solve it. He pointed out the Oslo Agreement of 1991 between Israel and Palestinians as an example of third party mediation's failure.

It appeared that the peace activists from both sides of the border often used the language of their governments on certain points. The discussion on third party mediation on Kashmir was an example of such an approach where Pakistani delegates advocated Islamabad's call for third party mediation, while their Indian friends repeated New Delhi's version of no third party intervention.

Major General (Retd) Dipankar Banerjee, executive director Regional Center for Strategic Studies, Colombo, also shared the views of Wesskar: "Peace can not be imposed by

someone else, but it has to emerge from the root. And it is better to sort out our problems on a bilateral basis rather than inviting others to help us." In his view, the conflicts in South Asia have a historical background. "The geo-politics of SA in the 20th Century was shaped by violence in its creation. Early conflict in Jammu and Kashmir and related issues led to mutual acrimony, suspicion and military confrontation that lasted rest of the previous century. Each trying to outdo the other in a vicious and never ending zero-sum game has affected the geo-politics of the entire region."

Unfortunately, he said, the post-Cold War era did not open up opportunities of peace and cooperation internationally but its impact on SA was muted. "Cold War legacies continued in the mind set and attitudes of political leaders in both countries and an intensification of violence in Jammu and Kashmir ensured that there was to be no peace dividend in the region."

Interestingly, senior as well as young intellectuals, who addressed the workshop, despite coming up with their lengthy papers on the background and impact of CBMs, seemed a bit disappointed while referring to the failure of CBMs in achieving any successful results in the context of Pak-India confrontation, particularly the Kashmir dispute.

"CBMs are central to any peace process as witnessed in other peace processes in various parts of the world. But in SA, the peace process has not really

## Recommendations of the workshop

1. We should identify and understand the new emerging trends in the international security environment and their direct and indirect impact on South Asia. Therefore, a fresh perspective is needed for South Asia.
2. Non-traditional threats to security should be taken seriously by the policymakers of all South Asian countries, such as water, environment, energy, gender and other issues.
3. There should be focus on human security and its role must be taken into consideration.
4. The process of dialogue between leaders should not stop even in adverse conditions.
5. Consensus on traditional and non-traditional paradigms of security, peace process and confidence-building measures should be created in the backdrop of developments taking place after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C on September 11th.
6. The regional conflicting issues should be dealt regionally under the auspices of SAARC and with international cooperation.
7. South Asian countries should have responsibility and they should develop confidence among themselves so that a regional agenda could be developed.
8. Military build-up is not compatible with the security of South Asia. All South Asian states have to seriously chalk out a strategy for reducing armed forces.
9. The consensus is that the future of South Asia is bleak but there is a sign of optimism.
10. Small states of South Asia and their security concerns related to environment, population, ethnicity, gender, and water should be adequately addressed.
11. Role of intellectuals for peacebuilding in South Asia should be recognized by the policymakers.
12. People of South Asia should take the responsibility and stop the ruling elite from acting in an irresponsible manner.
13. Research and development should not be sidelined and should be promoted by the policy-oriented institutions of South Asia.
14. Public awareness about the costs of conflict should be created in South Asia.
15. Jihad forces should be re-integrated in South Asia.
16. Activists and policymakers of South Asia should have coordination in the process of peace and conflict resolution in South Asia.
17. Economic development should be given priority in South Asia and the problems of the people should be given top priority by the governments of India and Pakistan.
18. Human development should be the main concern of the governments of India and Pakistan.
19. Regional approaches to peace and security should be encouraged, which will promote regional stability.
20. War is not a solution to the Kashmir issue, and the issue should be resolved according to the United Nations resolution through plebiscite and the will of the Kashmiri people.

taken off despite an array of CBMs being agreed upon during the last decade and a half," said Shaheen Akhtar, a senior research analyst at Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. She said that the main cause of the failure of CBMs is the divergent perspective of the two countries on the relative utility of CBMs. "India maintains that CBMs in economic and cultural spheres will lead to resolution of the Kashmir conflict. Pakistan strongly believes that resolution of the region, not for the prospects of CBMs."

In her view, instead of taking a zero-sum approach, a parallel approach must be adopted that should include CBM in both spheres—military CBMs on Kashmir and non-military CBMs in economics and culture.

Wesskar viewed the situation with a realistic approach by pointing out the reason of the failure of CBMs: "Conflicts in SA are mostly created by states and can only be resolved when the states want to resolve them. As long as our governments are fraud we will be suffering conflicts."

He suggested that the people of the region should also emphasize on good governance in their countries. "But as a peace activist and an optimist, he believes that the civil society can influence and play a very important role in showing their narrow understanding of the system. They criticized the democracies in Europe, and some of them went to the extent of saying that India—despite having a 50-year-old democracy—is still facing

lot of problems. "Democracy and more democracy is the solution for every problem," was the repeated reply of Dr. Ahmed, who believes that democracy is the most suitable system for our society. "The path is very long but democracy is the only available option for the developing world," he added.

The Indian delegates appeared to view the situation in very realistic terms. "The reason for adversarial relations between India and Pakistan may also lie in identity politics rather than several points of difference between the two," said Karan Sawhney, director of International Center for Peace Initiatives, New Delhi, in his paper "India-Pak Diplomacy: a view from New Delhi". "Any peace process between them would require the transformation of the enemy imagery for this is where the actual battleground for India and Pakistan lies—the reconstruction of identities in an idiom that is non-threatening," he added.

"Our economic growth rate is increasing. We are focusing on our agriculture. We do not want any confrontation," said Wesskar adding, "If unfortunate incidents like attacking of the Indian Parliament do not take place, our business community will pressure the government to improve relations with neighbouring Pakistan."

Maj Gen (Retd) A R Siddiqui and former federal minister Syed Shafiq Shah Jamote, chaired various sessions of the workshop. Many participating students tried their best to bring some new ideas for peace and prosperity in the region, particularly in their session on "The Vision of South Asia in 2047". Yet, they failed short of addressing the question of how many more military governments does Pakistan have to bear in the future! "Though peace is the need of the hour but in Banerjee's view it will not emerge without the efforts of a strong coalition, the components of which should include—apart from officials and intellectuals—the support of a large section of the civil society. It is necessary to build this through a step-by-step incremental process of peace constructed painstakingly among and with a strong coalition. This will include identification of civil sector dialogue, confidence building measures, economic interaction and political discourse. Without a doubt, the workshop was one step forward in this direction."