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It's time to be pragmatic

How India and Pakistan can be good neighbours despite unresolved problems

IT WAS a historic day in Indian politics when Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attended the swearing-in ceremony of India's 15th Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Many people hope that this could give a new direction to the relationship between India and Pakistan.

Optimism is good, but it is reality that always prevails. Past experience shows us that the problems between India and Pakistan cannot be solved by conventional methods. Now is the time to rethink and come up with a creative formula, based not on idealism but pragmatism. In fact, there is no alternative to pragmatism on this issue.

India and Pakistan have tried to solve their problems through wars, Track-II diplomacy and the so-called internationalisation of the issue. None has yielded the desired result. So, there is need for a fresh outlook.

By a fresh outlook, I do not mean something entirely new. Rather, it is the revival of a wise formula initially suggested by eminent Pakistani economist Mahbub ul-Haq. When he had broached it, the people of Pakistan did not find it acceptable. He was forced to leave the country and settle in New York, where he died in 1998.

His formula was based on the delinking of political and economic issues, and on the notion that trade should not be held hostage to the Kashmir dispute. The delinking policy in this regard means putting controversial issues on the negotiation table, and opening up all other relationships such as trade, education,

free intellectual activity, business, industry, tourism, and so on.

Life is full of problems at the individual, social and international levels. The best and wisest course is to not allow problems to become hurdles in the path of development. It is good to try to solve all the problems, but in practice, it may not be a good option. It is better to observe the principle of differentiation, that is, leaving aside the controversial issues and opening all doors to avail of other op-



portunities, without any restriction.

This concept is justified by reason. A successful example of this formula can be found in the post-World War II era in Japan. After the war, there was a problem between the US and Japan, which was similar to the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. This centred on the Japanese island of Okinawa, which had been occupied by the US. Japan adopted the same delinking policy with regard to this island and diverted its energies towards post-war development. The result

was miraculous: within 30 years, Japan emerged as an economic superpower.

In 1947, Pakistan came into existence on account of the two-nation theory. But in reality, the two nations (India and Pakistan) ended up as two conflicting neighbours. This nature of Partition made two close neighbours into two distant neighbours, as described by Kuldip Nayar in his *Distant Neighbours* (1972). The question is not how to completely solve the problems, but how to stay as good neighbours in spite of the problems. The only practical formula in this situation is the delinking policy that was successfully adopted by Japan.

This issue is related to the development of both India and Pakistan. The two countries have had to go to war several times, which has not been good for either. Today, a Cold War-like

situation prevails between the two neighbours, which can result in disastrous outcomes for both. Reason tells us that if the ideal is not possible, then we have to opt for the pragmatic solution. Therefore, it is in the best interests of both the countries to bring an end to this unwanted situation.

After Independence, the first requirement for both countries was to develop themselves on world standards. However, this is yet to happen. For example, there is not a single university in either country

that measures up to international standards. This is the basic problem. Because of the situation that existed between the two countries, both were forced to enter into an arms race. Consequently, they spent huge amounts from their budget on defence, which they should have spent on their development. A permanent settlement should be brought about between the two countries, if not on an ideal basis, then on a pragmatic basis. **P**

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